

In her *Female Face of God in Auschwitz*, Melissa Raphael suggests that the book is “written, in some ways, for my daughter, as a way of telling her how the Holocaust might be, not redeemed, but qualified.” Similarly, *Hiding Places* is an account intended for a daughter, only this time it is Diane Wyshogrod who has compiled this book on the basis of her mother’s experiences of the *Shoah*. But make no mistake, as her mother defiantly states – “This is not a novel” (102), nor is it, for Wyshogrod, a “Media Event” (152).

Certainly, Wyshogrod, a psychiatrist, is careful when collating her mother’s testimony not to minimise her father’s experience of the *Shoah*; she explains that her father’s “entire family had been wiped out: his father, his mother, his two younger brothers, his sister. They were all murdered, but not before having been humiliated, terrorized and starved for years. The Horror Roll in my house: Warsaw. Treblinka. Majdanek. Bydżyń. Wieliczka. Plaszow. Flossenbürg. And finally, Theresienstadt. He survived slave labor. He escaped being executed by firing squad by the skin of his teeth. Then he lost his teeth when a German officer ... heaved a wooden stool into his face” (31). And of course, Wyshogrod has edited her father’s memoirs, *An Artist in the Death Camps*. But her mother was less inclined to talk about her experiences, instead modestly claiming: “Nothing happened to me.” As Wyshogrod points out, “Her ‘nothing’ consisted of being hidden [for sixteen months], together with her parents, in the cellar of a Polish Christian couple during World War II” (viii).

Thus, Wyshogrod’s *Hiding Places* is essentially a mother/daughter dialogue – an account of her own determination to “know how my mother and grandparents felt, crouching helplessly, endlessly, in that cellar,” and to try to understand “what motivated Łoziński [and his wife] to hide them” (261). This is a process of filling in the gaps, however traumatic. Wyshogrod

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accordingly frames her book around an ongoing interview with her mother, a visit to contemporary Żółkiew and an unsuccessful attempt to locate the “Łoziński’s house” and its cellar (176), her family’s effort to have the Łoziński couple acknowledged as “heroes” (116) and “Righteous Among the Nations” (277), and a comparison with her current life in Jerusalem, amid the ongoing threat of “Palestinian suicide bombers” (227).

Moreover, Wyshogrod’s *Hiding Places* is an attempt to understand how her mother survived the *Shoah*. But the comments at the onset, such as Wyshogrod speculating, “Maybe it [the interview process] wouldn’t be so hard” (9), does little to prepare the reader for the consequent account. Similarly, the revelation of an initial assumption that “maybe it would be better under the Germans” does not prepare Wyshogrod herself for the moving and frequently painful account of her mother’s experience in Żółkiew during the German occupation. This process, for Wyshogrod, is difficult to comprehend; in particular, her mother’s care for her dog above her own personal safety, even with the arrival of “German soldiers,” seems nonsensical (49). Equally, her own sense of “insignificance” (64) becomes evident as her mother calmly explains the establishment of “the ghetto” (55), the frequent “roundup of Jews” (61), the “taking people away ... and resettling them in work camps” (62), the fact that “We didn’t have a yellow star. We had a white armband with a blue star” (65), and then, the decisive, barbaric moment: “They shot all the thirty-five hundred Jews of Żółkiew” (80).

Wyshogrod conveys her understandable sense of being “helplessly angry” (62), but similarly, her mother’s account of life in the cellar is incomprehensible, not only to Wyshogrod, who concedes: “The thought of being stuck in a cold, dark cellar makes the back of my neck prickle” (85), but also to the reader, who is presented with a miserable window into her mother’s life. The bleakness of hours, days, and months spent in effectively a “dug-out hole in the ground” is unimaginable (84); the pace and frequency of Wyshogrod’s own questions reflects disbelief at the endurance displayed by her mother, and in turn, her parents; and the way in which time loses its meaning, difficult for both the reader and Wyshogrod to understand, is reflected by the repetition of her mother’s admission: “you just sit” (88). However, these revelations are nothing in comparison to the indignity of the “bathroom,” and her mother’s casual response: “No privacy. You had to go, you went” (96). Wyshogrod, like
the reader, is left asking: “How can I accept without understanding” (111)? This leads Wyshogrod back to Żółkiew.

The visit however, and the failure to locate the cellar, is similarly disturbing, leading Wyshogrod to conclude that her “mother has no home left on the face of the earth” (141). For Wyshogrod, this is a process of annihilation – “We don’t belong here. My parents do not belong here. Everything was ripped away from them: their families, their homes, their culture, their past, their present” (177). The question for Wyshogrod is how to reconcile her mother’s experiences with her own faith. The survivors’ descriptions of the atrocities – “The sand that was here, and this little river, ... was red, full of blood, full of corpses, full of the still-dying” (144) are difficult to endure, as is the awareness that “Many of the towns and villages we drive past had large Jewish populations. All gone. All dead” (149). Likewise, the “death-ditches” invite terrible reflection – “If I allow myself – really allow myself – to think of having to walk the last mile with my children, I will start to scream and scream and never stop” (155). Wyshogrod’s response is thus revealed in outbursts of anger, and when “memorial prayers” are recited, a defiant statement: “I don’t want to pray to a God who was silent” (154). For David Blumenthal, “To ‘do theology’ is to reflect and to share one’s thoughts about, and one’s experiences of God”;3 these “experiences,” for Wyshogrod, are understandably distressing – the quality of this text is in the way in which she transmits this sense of dislocation to the reader, who at once shares the silence (157).

But if Wyshogrod is unable to comprehend the experiences of her parents, she still possesses their tenacity; for Wyshogrod, it is necessary, however difficult, to seek meaning out of the destruction: “You can’t just put people in a hole, hiding for their lives, praying not to die, and have it not mean anything to anyone afterward” (188). Wyshogrod thus looks to “understand” the motivation and perspectives of Emil and Maria Łoziński in helping her mother and grandparents, which in the end comes as a surprise – “They were hoping they would convert,” Wyshogrod’s father intervenes (266); the Łoziński’s accordingly believed that the family’s survival was down to “the Holy Mary” (268). Consequently, the local priest had advised her grandfather: “You survived as a Jew, thank God for that, and stay what you are”

(266). For Wyshogrod this is the necessary explanation; the Łoziński’s are “a deafening rebuttal” to the “aloneness” and “desertion by humanity” that her family and their friends experienced during the Shoah (262), and which is evident in *Hiding Places*. In sum, Wyshogrod’s aim is to pay “respect: to a world that is no more and especially to people who are no more” (64); certainly, this is achieved in *Hiding Places*. In the end, while Wyshogrod’s concedes that she has “moved” a “little closer to her [mother’s] experience,” it is “only a little” (281), and that is perhaps the most anybody can hope for. As Tova Ilan suggests, “The effort to preserve an event, especially within the cultural context of remembrance, requires a conscious effort to overcome human nature – forgetfulness.” Wyshogrod’s account is such a “conscious effort.”

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