



THE HOLOCAUST IS A DIFFICULT SUBJECT TO broach with anyone, especially so with children. How can children learn about the horrors and atrocities without having nightmares? How can children learn about one of the worst events in history without adopting a negative view of humanity themselves?

It's natural to want to shield our children from the harsher aspects of life. Yet, we feel a duty to teach them. But at what age is it appropriate?

While children cannot fully comprehend its complexities, they can nonetheless begin to learn about the Holocaust in a simplified manner.

To that end, Chavi Diamond, author of *The Promise*, gently introduces young children to the topic of the Holocaust.

This is why. . .

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

CitySpirit: What inspired you to write this book?

Chavi Diamond: My parents were holocaust survivors. I've always been interested in hearing their stories and would encourage them to share their experiences with my children. I read books on the topic and as an artist I paint commemorative pieces as well.

The last two years of my mother's life, she fell ill and moved into my home. She was often lonely, missing the company of friends her own age.

There is this wonderful elderly woman, Miriam*, that davens in our shul and I asked her to visit my mother. She did and she brought all her friends. My mother and

Miriam, also a Holocaust survivor, had much in common and they became good friends. I became close to her as well and my children adopted her as a grandmother figure.

Last year on Pesach I saw Miriam walking across the street with her head down – so unlike her. I went over to say good Yom Tov and saw instantly that she had been crying. She looked distraught, depressed.

I asked her what was wrong and, boy, did she tell me. She had joined her children for the *seder* and naturally Pharaoh and the story of the Jews in *Mitzrayim* were discussed at length. The children all knew the stories. Miriam brought up the Holocaust as a comparison, and

she was shocked to learn that the children's knowledge was minimal at best.

How could it be, she asked, that year after year, children are taught about the events leading up to *yitzias mitzrayim*, but there is no curriculum for Holocaust studies in her grandchildren's schools. How could it be, that even the youngest of children know that the Jews were enslaved and tortured by the Egyptians, but nothing of the horrors that their own grandparents went through.

Her words stung me. I can only imagine how she must have felt. I felt embarrassed for my generation, ashamed of our schools. What can I say in our defense? Nothing at all. But moving forward there is much I could do – and it became my mission.

I started by researching the availability of Holocaust books for children. There are books out but nothing appropriate for younger children, I'm talking about five to eight year olds. The books were either too scary or they were fictional depictions of events.

I decided to fill that void and that is what led me to write *The Promise*.

CS: An actual account?

CD: Yes, it is a true story about my 'aunt'. She is an incredible woman and she encouraged me to do this. She speaks at schools and events about the Holocaust and she is now using *The Promise* as a vehicle to teach younger audiences.

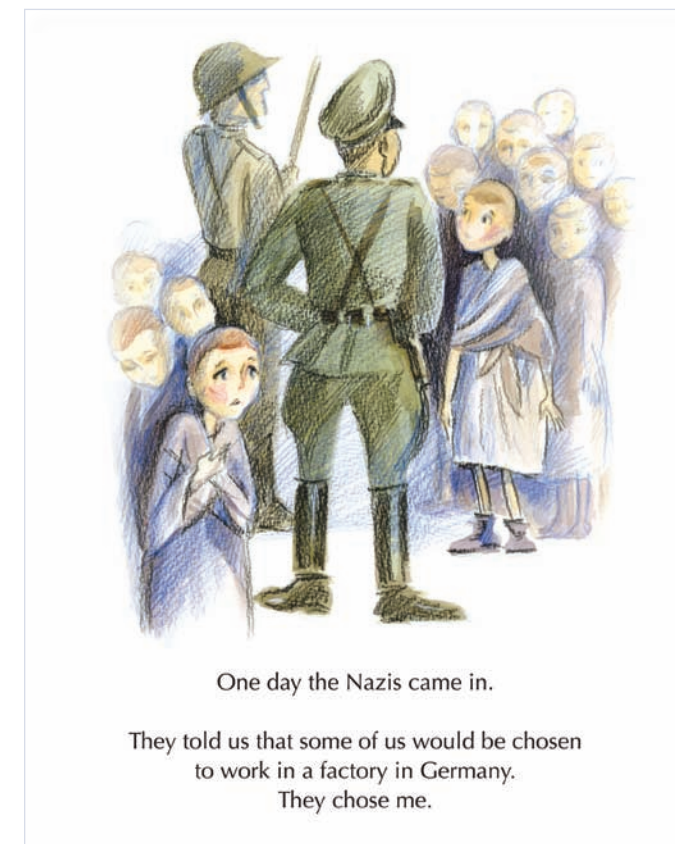
CS: Don't you worry that such young children may not be ready to take this on?

CD: First exposure should come sooner than the teenage years. Just like the story of Pharaoh is repeated and reinforced year after year. At different levels. It gets heavier as the child grows.

CS: What kind of feedback are you getting?

CD: Very positive. Its amazing and very encouraging. I am planning a website and a blog for comments and discussions. I'm also inviting people to send me their stories, I want all the stories to be true, even the true identities if they want.

I was very impressed by a five year old girl named Shira. She was at her grandmother's house, a friend of mine. She saw the book on the coffee table and asked to have it read to her. Her father didn't think it was a good idea. She'll have nightmares, she'll feel sad. But this little girl can be very convincing, promising her father she'll be fine. She won the argument and her grandmother read her the story.



Afterwards, Shira, very solemnly told her grandmother that just like Eva promised her mother she would take care of her sister and she did, "I will also keep my promise. I won't have nightmares and I won't be sad."

CS: Do you have plans for more books?

CD: Definitely. And from different countries – Austria, Germany – I want the reader to know that Hitler gathered the Jews all over – it didn't just happen only in one place. I want the reader to know it didn't matter if you were religious or not, rich or poor – it happened to all Jews – doctors, philosophers, economists.

I was approached by a large Jewish organization that is interested in having me write a series of books. Short chapters with questions for discussion. I'm very excited about it.

CS: Seems you have your work cut out for you.

CD: I'm making a difference, that's the important thing. Now is the time – before all the witnesses have passed – to educate our children – to perpetuate the memory of our loved ones.

To order *The Promise*, to have a personal story published or to be involved in future projects contact: Heart to Heart Memories, Chavi (Eva) Diamond at 917.681.8688 or info@h2hmemories.com