**Foreword** (*Abbreviated*)

As I write these words I am on a plane coming back home from Macedonia where we opened a Museum of Jewish History and most especially Holocaust history on the 75th anniversary of the March 11, 1943 deportation of Macedonian Jews to Monopol, a tobacco factory, which became a temporary ghetto of Jews from Stip, Bitola and Skopje. In less than three weeks 7,144 Jews were deported to Treblinka where they were gassed. By all accounts of visitors, the most powerful part of the Museum, the indispensable part of the Museum, are the films based on the testimonies of survivors telling their stories. Their words are compelling; they make the abstract events of a distant history come alive for the visitor. They negate the Nazi process of dehumanization that was so essential to the killing process by making the story personal, not about Six Million but about person after person, persons like you and me.

As I was in Macedonia I heard the sad news from my friend Anne Kirschner that her mother Sala died at the end of a long and productive life. Anne had spent years piecing together her mother’s story reluctantly revealed to her decades ago when Sala thought she might die and her hidden letters might be lost to history. Anne had a difficult task, yet it was made so much less onerous because Sala was alive and the moving book and the special exhibition that followed could be a collaborative effort.

Gary Reiner had a more difficult task. Kurt Reiner, whose voice and story he captured so movingly, was long gone, having died of natural causes decades earlier and Gary was determined that Kurt’s story be told. Even in death, he could transmit his unique memory and tell his powerful story.

How many survivors are alive today?

If truth be told, we do not really know and not only because the answer depends on the definition of the term survivor. But one fact is clear. There are less survivors today than there were yesterday and there will be even less tomorrow than there were today.

We are at a transition moment in the history of the Holocaust between lived history and historical memory. And the second generation, the descendants of survivors, must assume an added burden for they were closest to that lived history. They are its continuity. And Gary Reiner provides a model of what can be done, what should be done and what must be done.

*Counting on America* tells a remarkable story of a Viennese Jewish family torn apart by the Holocaust. Gary Reiner captures his father’s voice and tells the story with power and poignancy. The documentation is extraordinary, rich and detailed. It seems as if Kurt had saved and Gary had gathered every scrap of paper and these documents tell Kurt’s story.

Kurt depicted his experience with great vividness. Permit me an example. The reader may know the bare facts of the November 1938 pogroms known as Kristallnacht, more than 1000 synagogues were set aflame, 7,000 business were looted and destroyed, fire brigades were instructed to let the businesses and the synagogue go up in flames and only to intervene if the fire threated the buildings next door. Thirty thousand Jewish men – aged 16 to 60 – were arrested and sent to newly expanded concentration camps. But statistics don’t tell the story. Kurt was one of those men taken from his home and shipped off to Dachau. Each detail is captured, the fear and surprise, the intimidation and the humiliations. The plural is deliberate because Kurt was humiliated again and again. Remarkably, he did not internalize those humiliations; incarcerated as one of a herd, he never lost that inner freedom and that inner freedom gave him the opportunity to live.

One must say in retrospect – and only in retrospect -- those arrested on the nights of November 9 and 10, 1938 were the lucky ones because at that point it was still possible to leave Germany if one could document that they would leave the country within a fortnight. Since Kurt could not get out on his own, he was completely dependent on the initiative and the indefatigable determination of his wife Hennie who understood that leaving Germany was a matter of life and death. At considerable risk to herself – one did not deal with the Gestapo without consequences and the risks were even greater for a young and attractive woman -- Hennie prevailed.

Had this been a Hollywood movie, there would have been a loving reunion and the young couple would have sailed off into freedom. But such was not to be the case. Documents granting one the possibility of flight were rather different than actually getting out of Nazi Germany. So Kurt and Hennie had to go into hiding, sneak over borders and live in the shadows as ever more desperate refugees.

Survivors will often tell you not with false modesty but in all truthfulness that the reason they survived was luck. By that they mean, that they knew someone wiser and stronger, more accomplished and more-worthy; in contrast to those who were at the wrong place at the wrong time and whose luck ran out and were murdered. But survivors are not a random sample of the victims. They had drive and determination, often they had nerves of steel and were willing to take changes where others were paralyzed by fear. You will see each of these qualities in Kurt and Hennie.

Holocaust historian David Marwell once remarked that “just because Jews were powerless did not mean that they were passive.” And Kurt was willing to gamble, to take chances not only to survive but even to escape a French concentration camp to see his wife – and then return. Audacious and daring but never reckless, he had chutzpah. Together with luck, these qualities enabled him to survive. He also had Hennie whose deeds speak for themselves though one wishes we heard more of her voice. She was equal to the challenge, bold and daring in her own right, capable of fending for herself when necessary and more formidable still when she was with her husband.

This is the remarkable story of a remarkable man who was a pioneer in space exploration after his harrowing journey to freedom. The book speaks boldly of the promise of America for immigrants who come here seeking freedom, opportunity and religious tolerance; it has a special poignancy at this moment in time for it addresses the issues of our day when once again our shores are closed to those desperately needing refuge.

Kurt Reiner represents the promise of America and the dignity of the Jew. And Gary Reiner has empowered him to speak to future generations.

Michael Berenbaum

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Somewhere over the Atlantic

*Project Director (1988-1993), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (overseeing its creation), President and Chief Executive Officer of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, Director of the United States Holocaust Research Institute at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Hymen Goldman Adjunct Professor of Theology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and Director of Sigi Ziering Institute.*