

*My colleagues have been encouraging me to submit this article which is based on two small, but significant, experiences I had with my children. While of clinical interest might be how the Holocaust continues to reverberate in the lives of children of Survivors, these experiences also illustrate how your family history influences how you parent and how we can talk with our children about our painful past in order to teach them valuable lessons.*

The Holocaust is always with me, in both painful and positive ways. It has a way of intersecting my daily life unexpectedly and helps me appreciate what I have and the difference I can make.

You can't always plan those moments that make a difference, but you can choose what to do with them.

Two weeks before Christmas and Chanukah six years ago, I picked up my son early from his Kindergarten afterschool program to get his favorite treat at our local bakery. An unusually windy day prevented us from sitting outside; so Jacob and I got back in the car to eat his chocolate chip cookie and milk. As we ate and talked, we watched the lady in the bakery begin to paint holiday decorations on the windows. She dipped a sponge into green paint and with her stencil of a Christmas tree she created a textured replica on the glass. As we began to put on our seatbelts to head home, we saw her dipping another sponge in yellow and with her other stencil begin to paint a Star of David in bright glowing vivid yellow.

My heart stopped, and then began to pound with heightened awareness. It pounded for the past and in protection of the present sitting next to me. It was the proverbial moment of truth. I knew I not only had to say something to the bakery lady, but in so doing, would have to say something to Jacob about the Holocaust—not some abstract event of history that happened to others elsewhere, but a personal family horror that wiped out virtually all of his family roots.

Those terrible times are always with me as a child of Holocaust Survivors. A mixture of deep sorrow yet determination inhabits me. It informs how I live my life, how I raise my children, how I try to heal the suffering of others in my therapy office.

## The past is in the present

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*You can't always plan those moments that make a difference, but you can choose what to do with them.*

I remember how my mother told me about the yellow star. It branded her and the other Jews of Europe visible targets of hatred. Yet what she emphasized was pride, not victimization. "We didn't just sew it on. We embroidered all around it, to make it look beautiful. We were proud to be Jews, even though we were ridiculed and taunted with 'dirty Jew' songs." The rounding up soon followed in the Spring of '44, the day after Passover, the holiday celebrating freedom. Then came the ghetto, and finally the herding into boxcars to an unknown destination. "We were told we were leaving to go to work. And then we arrived in Auschwitz."

I take off my seatbelt as the past and present melt together. I have anticipated this moment

before my children were even born. I glance at Jacob. He radiates innocence. How do I say something without saying everything? How do I speak of some suffering, some death, when there was so much suffering and so much death? To protect his childhood, I must find a way to say just a little. But a little that would mean something. I owe that to those whose lives have been extinguished and to those who survived. "I'll be right back, Jacob. I just want to say a few words to that lady inside." "What? What? What's the matter?" "It's OK," I say reassuringly. "I'll explain in a minute. You can watch me from here. I won't be long."

I gathered my thoughts and emotions as I walked inside the bakery and began calmly, "Excuse me, I was wondering if you realized what a Jewish star in yellow means, what it symbolizes?" She responded, "You know, I was thinking about that. Do you think it would be better if I painted it in white?" Was her question about aesthetics or was there some vague sense of history in it? I briefly explained the reference and that seeing it might evoke some pain for some people, and that any other color would be fine, with white and blue traditionally used, representing Israel. She thanked me and said she appreciated my calling this to her attention. "I wouldn't want to offend anybody."

"What happened? What did you say to her? Why is she wiping off the yellow?" Jacob asked with curiosity as I returned. He doesn't know horror or evil yet. Sure he's felt bad, has had his feelings hurt by others, but his world is full of compassion and understanding and trust. I don't want to shake any of that.

I begin gently and matter-of-factly, "When grandma and grandpa were teenagers, Jews had to wear yellow stars on the outside of their jackets." (They were in their late 20's actually. I thought, but he knew about teenagers from watching reruns of "Happy Days.") "And many people treated them very mean and some were even killed."

"Some were even killed?" The "some" that were killed were my grandparents whom I never knew, all the aunts, and uncles, and cousins I never had the chance to meet and have as part of my life. My parents' entire world of European Jewry essentially ceased to exist as six million individual Jewish faces,