Follow-up interviewing of child survivors is best accomplished when the survivor is viewed as a normal person who has lived through abnormal times. The author interviewed the 24 child survivors who lived in the Lingfield Children's Home in England, cared for by Alice Goldberger. The six youngest of this group who had been inmates of Terezin Concentration Camp were described in A. Freud and S. Dann's monograph. In this paper, follow-up interviews with four of the youngest group are discussed with respect to subsequent reverberations after the interviews for each. Using Freud's classic monograph, Goldberger's notes and her own observations, the author draws attention to three factors contributing to vulnerability or resilience in these survivor's lives: adaptability, appeal to adults, and assertiveness. Child survivors have much to contribute to the study of resilience over the life span.

In 1977, the author initiated a follow-up of the 24 young child survivors of the Holocaust who came to England after World War II and who had lived in the Lingfield orphanage under the direction of Alice Goldberger, with the counsel of Anna Freud and the support of the West London Synagogue (Moskovitz, 1983).

Twelve of these survivors had been in Terezin, five in Auschwitz, four in hiding, and three briefly in the concentration camp Kistarca in Hungary, followed by stays in orphanages in Budapest, before coming to England. The majority (21 of the 24) were between 3 and 8 years old on arrival in England. All were veterans of persecution stress, of tragic sudden separations, and disappearances of loved ones. They had survived starvation, cold, and illnesses without proper care. All feared Nazis, guns, and dogs. For them, childish fears of abandonment, annihilation, and hostile adults were reality, not fantasy. On arrival to the Lingfield Children's Home, such questions as "Will the walls be here tomorrow?" convey the depth of their insecurity.

In addition, each subgroup had lived through its own hell. The Terezin children had been present at hangings before the whole camp. Children as young as 6 were forced to stand in line and relay boxes of human ashes (Daniels, 1983; Janet, 1984; Silten, 1984). The Auschwitz children, living beneath the stench of crematoria smoke, were surrounded by dying and dead bodies. The children who survived the special terror of being in hiding lived with the fear of being found out by neighbors or, worse still, being turned in by their own protectors if they failed to please or began looking too Jewish (Beim, 1983). They had to assume a false identity, different from their parents, during those early years in which one ordinarily learns to trust one's own parents and identity. An indexed list of topics of child survivor documentation videotapes reads as a macabre distortion of childhood ABCs—from A for Abandonment, Anti-Semitism, Auschwitz Kinderbloch, etc., through to Wandering and finally Zionism as hope for a future (Moskovitz, 1983b).

Given their array of experiences, one can hardly overestimate the importance of learning from child survivors, for they offer us first the unparalleled opportunity to capture the essence of how massive trauma in early life reverberates across the life span. Second, they can teach us who and what has been helpful to them and also what may be irrelevant or detrimental in the presently hazy understanding of vulnerability and resilience.

Indeed, what became apparent to me early on in the interviewing process was the wide range of adaptation where there was theoretically no reason to expect to see anything positive.

It is conceivable that, had serious attention been given earlier to child survivors in the general population, we would not have been saddled until now with the grim, only partially representative picture that emerged of the irreparably damaged child survivors of the late 1970s. This bleak distorted picture was based on a relatively small amount of evidence: from descriptions of surviving children written soon after the war (Hicklin, 1946; Poltawska, 1971; Wolfheim, 1959); from a scattered handful of case studies (Engel, 1962;
Gyomroi, 1963); from clinical observations (Chodoff, 1975; Sterba, 1968); and from examinations for restitution payments from Germany (Lempp, 1979).

As can be seen from the above, the broader range of child survivors are not in treatment and who have not applied for restitution from Germany (the vast majority) have escaped recognition except in the following: 1) a large follow-up study in Holland (not yet translated to English) wherein Keilson (1979) found, contrary to his expectations, a group of well-adapted survivors; and 2) research undertaken in Israel by Klein (1974), Hemmendinger (1982), and this author (1983a).

After a brief observation of the interviewer's role, this paper will focus on four of the six youngest Terezin survivors in order to: 1) relate some of the subsequent reverberations in their lives following the interviews which demonstrate the potential for the follow-up interview to serve as a catalyst for reintegration; and 2) present three factors impressionistically drawn from these lives which increased vulnerability or resilience and merit further study.

The interviewer of child survivors becomes a helper-midwife for a self coming out of hiding. With the exception of a few brilliant child survivor authors, most people who have survived as children keep their childhoods hidden as shameful secrets for many reasons, not the least of which is the wish not to be automatically stigmatized as damaged and different. The wish to appear as ordinary and normal is expressed by child survivors over and over again and has led for many to the development of what Krell (1983) has termed "chameleon-like" talents. What seems crucial is that the interviewer consider the child survivor as a normal person who has been subjected to abnormal events (as opposed to a person whose abnormalities are going to be explored without relationship to history and culture). Such a context for the survivors' telling can lift some of the shame, inferiority, and self-blame internalized in childhood, and allow the survivor to begin to see him or herself as assuming a rightful place socially and in history among other survivors. This place has, until recently, been denied. The experience of child survivors has been one of being discounted when the child is not automatically regarded as damaged. They have been discounted by the German government, by adults who have said to them "Since you were only a child and can't remember, it didn't mean anything." They have even been told by older survivors that the children were lucky to have avoided slave labor and then live after the war in an orphanage where they were well fed and didn't have to fend for themselves.

Child survivors were told they could not remember, they should not remember, and what they remember is not valid but is instead only fantasy or screen memory—and that what they remember they ought to forget. Therefore, a follow-up interview that treats the person's memory as a valid and credible part of self begins to redress the denial of the survivor's experience and consequent feelings of isolation and begins to increase our knowledge about the range of child survivor experience and adaptation.

Anna Freud's and Sophie Dann's descriptions in their monograph, "An Experiment in Group Upbringing" (1951), are the only descriptions of 3-year-old child survivors in existence. The reader who wishes to refer to this monograph will find the name given by Freud and Dann in parentheses (below) following the name chosen by the survivor for publication by this author.

All four had arrived in Terezin when only months old. Unlike older survivors, they therefore had no prewar nourishing images to sustain them (Auerhahn and Laub, 1984). The nature of their mother-infant relationships is largely unknown. They had spent approximately 2½ of their 3 years in concentration camps, in the Ward for Motherless Children, where they were cared for by successive caretakers, themselves camp inmates subject to deportation to Auschwitz. They had no toys and outdoor life consisted of a bare yard. Martha Wenger, one of their caretakers who survived, reported in a letter to Alice Goldberger in 1946:

In the Ward of Motherless Children everybody tried to work as little as possible to make up for the lack of proper nourishment. There was always too much work and too few people to help me. Besides looking after the children we had to see to their clothes, etc., which took time. We looked after the bodily welfare of the children as much as possible, kept them free of vermin for 3 years, and we fed them as well as possible under the circumstances. But it was not possible to attend to their other needs. Actually we did not have the time to play with them.

Upon arrival in England, unaccompanied by a familiar caretaker, they lived from August to October in Reception Camp Windermere, then were moved to Bulldog's Bank in a cottage provided just for them, along with new caretakers. After approximately 10 months they were moved again to the Lingfield Children's Home. They had experienced four known changes in caretakers within the year following liberation. We do not know the number of changes prior to this.

Jack (John) and Bella (Miriam) were adopted out of Lingfield at age 5. Leah (Leah) was adopted at age
8 out of yet another residential placement, a school for backward children where she had been sent in her sixth year. The school was not far from Lingfield and Alice Goldberger, the exceptionally devoted matron of Lingfield, continued to visit Leah. Berl (Paul) cried miserably through two separate adoption tries which were cut short. He spent his entire childhood at Lingfield.

The Freud and Dann (1951) monograph contains detailed descriptions of each child, gathered over the first year in England. All were small for their age and showed effects of severe malnutrition; the effect on Berl was so severe that he had difficulty walking. They resisted making attachments to adults. The children had adapted to the lack of continuing caretaking by substituting their own peer group as the primary attachment and continued to do so for a long time. They all suffered restlessness, showed severe emotional disturbance, were hypersensitive and aggressive, and delayed in language development. They showed heightened autoeroticism and some showed the beginning of neurotic symptoms, but according to Freud, "They were neither deficient, delinquent nor psychotic. They had found an alternative placement for their libido (the group) and on the strength of this had mastered some of their anxieties and developed social attitudes."

Brief Reports of Follow-up Interviews
(These were begun in 1979 when the survivors were 37, and continued in 1984)

Jack. Jack has been married for more than 20 years to a very supportive wife and has two daughters who both go to school and work. Jack owns his own taxi in London and enjoys meeting all kinds of people. He has a sense of mystery and excitement about what may be revealed to him by a stranger. His easy wit, warmth, and friendly charm were apparent during the first interview in 1979 in which he admitted to sudden bouts of depression where he felt a yearning to find information about his mother, of whom he had no memory. He longed for a picture of her, to make contact with someone who could tell him about her. He could not forgive his adoptive mother for withholding information about his past from him and for not wanting him to name one of his daughters after his birth mother, who was killed by the Nazis. In that interview, he focused his loss and longing, his anger for the piddling sum paid as restitution by the German government for loss of a mother, his frustration with his adoptive mother for having concealed his adoption and concentration camp past from him, and her unwillingness even now to discuss it. He compared himself to the underachieving and culturally deprived, and sadly wondered if he could have done better in school had he got a better start in life. In answer to his self-doubts, he was assured that he was not strange for feeling as he did. In this interview he stated his values: "Biology, life is first. Health is second. Love is third and possession is last."

A year later, when he heard about the world gathering of Holocaust survivors in Israel, he decided to go. With his wife and daughters he pursued what he called his quest to find a connection to his mother. The quest was fraught with terrible frustration; the computer matching of survivors had broken down; during a visit to the kibbutz founded by Terezin survivors he tearfully pleaded with a Kibbutznik that he must be in their files since he was in Terezin. The Kibbutznik replied that he could not have been there since at 37 he was too young. Finally, his name was found but no one there could tell him anything about his mother. Upset and grieving, he returned to England.

The following summer, Jack and his wife visited Terezin and saw the houses in which he had been incarcerated. There he mourned for himself, his lost infancy and early childhood. He ended a diary of this trip stating, "I feel lost, waiting to be found."

When the book came out with his interview in it, he read to his adoptive mother the parts pertaining to him. The letter describing this visit was jubilant; his mother had told him that though her intention had been to spare him pain, she had been wrong to withhold information from him and was sorry.

In the winter of 1984, in response to a questionnaire sent to all the Lingfield Children's Home alumnae, Jack answered the question, "What is your greatest problem now?" with: "Resigning myself to never finding anything about my mother, not even a picture of her." The fact that he phrased this in terms of "resigning" himself may signify that the process of active search and reality testing that was mobilized in the first interview helped work through his grief to some extent and that the resignation to the loss is a result of that grieving. A further consequence of this process is the wish expressed in a meeting during the summer of 1984, 5 years following the first interview: "I'd like to feel more like a real son to my (adoptive) mother."

Bella. Bella lost her mother at birth or immediately thereafter. Nevertheless, dominant, confident, assertive and vital as a toddler, she had been referred to by the adults as Bella-Pick-It-Up because she was able to get the other children to pick things up for her and wait on her. On her first day in Lingfield she was able to find her way across the huge mansion from the dining room to her room. She had selected her adoptive parents by planting herself on her adoptive fath-
her's lap when the couple came to look over the Lingfield children for adoption.

As an adult in 1981 she appeared sunny, vital, and confident. Despite her husband's recent heart surgery she believed that they could come through anything together. She had started a business dealing in art which was doing well and which she enjoyed. She also worked as magistrate on cases involving children. In her interview she struggled with the problem of whether to reveal to her children that their grandparents were in reality her adoptive parents, and that she had been orphaned in the Holocaust. She expressed fear of burdening her three young to middle adolescent children with hatred of the Germans and knowledge of evil by revealing her true family history. She felt she owed her adoptive parents, with whom she had had a stormy relationship (culminating in her being sent away to boarding school), a better relationship with their grandchildren. She feared revelation of adoption would undercut that relationship.

Despite some anxiety created by thinking about the past, she revealed keen memory and accurate images of Bulldog's Bank and for the group at Lingfield. In discussing her work as a magistrate in which she was sometimes asked to deal with child adoptions, she said she refused because she feels biased toward leaving children in a good group home "where they have the companionship of other children, rather than being isolated individually into families that really don't know how to cope with them." When asked what the problems might be for a child growing up in a children's home, she could think of none. She said she had happy memories of Lingfield and remembered herself as a self-sufficient child, as a leader. She revealed a compassionate interest in the "strays" of society and an interest in hearing other's problems. She had difficulty, however, in sharing her past with anyone but her husband.

She saw her deep commitment to Judaism and learning about its history as restorative for herself: "That way one had continuity, and I suppose in a way that made up for my lack of family: the whole Jewish history and race was my family." Still, she cautioned care in raising one's children "too Jewish" lest that breed intolerance and separateness.

Following the interview, she wrote to ask whether I thought she should tell her children that she was adopted and if so, why. I answered that I could not advise by mail but thought that things in a family that are assumed to be secret are not always and that perhaps she would like to talk it over with a rabbi whom she knew and who had been a young adolescent survivor on the same planeload of survivors that brought her to England from Prague. She did this and found the courage to tell her family. When next I saw her about a year later, she told me that her adoptive parents took her revelation of adoption to their grandchildren quite well. With pride she added that her oldest daughter had decided to study medicine in Israel and one of her other children had become a student of the Holocaust.

On her questionnaire, in answer to what was most worthwhile about being interviewed, she said, "I was able to pinpoint for myself the areas that had disturbed me most about my history."

A sensitive area she has not yet chosen to deal with is the possibility of contacting a maternal aunt who may still be alive and who did contact Bella's adoptive parents several years ago after she was adopted, when she was about 10. The aunt, a survivor, was discouraged from further contact by the wealthy adoptive parents who did not wish this disturbance. Bella's hurt that the aunt gave up is audible in her voice when she answers the question, "Have you thought about getting in touch with this aunt?" with another question which has the tone of an accusation: "Why hasn't she found me?"

Berl. Berl was the only one of the toddlers not adopted in childhood. Two tries at adoption failed at least in part because of his inability to separate from Alice Goldberger. He was the youngest at the orphanage and felt like a tag-along. He had spent his whole childhood feeling unloved, inferior, and a nuisance for taking things apart and not being able to put them together again. He taunted animals to get even. He has no memory of the 2 years he spent in five-times-a-week analysis. He had no secure connection with any adult. The pain of rejection in his orphanage life was a large part of the focus of his interview, much of which took place in the presence of his aunt and uncle. They, survivors too, had learned of his existence when he was 17. They then brought him to America and adopted him. Though 37 at the time of the interview, it was apparent that he was treated like a little boy who did not know what was good for him and was not listened to. My need to hear his story from him gave him his aunt's and uncle's full attention. From their reactions of wonderment, I had the feeling they, too, were hearing his story fully and in a different way.

When asked to tell about his life, Berl revealed the depth of his deprivation: "Came out of Germany when I was 3 years old, went to school in England. You get your breakfast. You get your lunch. You get your dinner."

When discussing his experience at the farm training school, he again recalled being given regular meals and, while working at an overseer's house cleaning floors, being asked to sit down and given "a cup of coffee or tea."

As a convoy driver in Vietnam, for which he enlisted
in the midst of a troubled marital relationship (which ended in divorce), Berl recalls having a refrigerator, a fan, and a television, and going down to the Tan Hep Orphanage to give things to the kids who had no mother and father. He described how the kids would “swarm all around you when you came through the gate, and grab hold of your hand. The nuns appreciated what we did. I really enjoyed it. It was more or less therapy for me.” His pride and satisfaction were clear; at last to be the giver, respected and appreciated while still sensing deep inside the presence of his own hungry little orphan.

A highlight of this interview was Berl’s taking stock of his life by contrasting the deprivation of the past with the bounty of the present; his feelings of insecurity in the past (knowing they could evict him from the children’s home) with the belonging he felt in his aunt and uncle’s house, “having two people who really care about me, who have a conscience about me.”

Berl expressed his longing to reconnect with and find acceptance from the Lingfield people of his past. Shortly after this interview he wrote to Alice Goldberger and asked if he could come to visit. He wrote to a former resident of Lingfield and asked her to marry him. They both said no. Despite these new rejections, which must have confirmed the reality of the old ones for him, he continued to reach out—perhaps with a more integrated sense of self and respect for the long, hard road he had traveled. He married a year later and now has a baby. In his questionnaire he writes, “The best part of my life is now. I have a loving wife who cares about me and that makes me feel real good.” Also, “I enjoy my work in the city. It keeps me busy and relieves a lot on my mind. What I regret most is being raised in a foster home for all those years. There is nothing like a mother and father.”

On a checklist of “attitudes in childhood that you think were valuable in helping you survive as a child,” he checked, “being a fighter,” “staying in the background,” and “not needing others too much.” He adds an important item not on the list: “Taking care of yourself the best you can.”

Since his uncle’s death, Berl and his wife and child have moved into the aunt’s home and Berl has been working as a skilled craftsman for a large company.

Leah. Shortly after they were interviewed, Paul and Leah established phone contact after being out of touch since age 7. In this first of many conversations, they both agreed that they had been the “outcasts” in the Lingfield home. Adults found them difficult; Berl’s incessant masturbation as a toddler and Leah’s clingy whininess with adults and aggressiveness with children, served to alienate caretakers. After arrival in England, Leah had experienced two devastating separations from the toddler group in which these children found their security (there having been no consistent adult); the first separation was for ringworm shortly on arrival in England and the second about a year later for corrective eye surgery. Then, while her group was dissolved by the four adoptions that took place, she was sent from Lingfield to a residential school for “backward” children. From there she was taken by a couple who wanted to raise her. The mother was a teacher who wanted desperately to prove she could restore this unhappy child to normalcy. With her adoptive mother’s intense effort Leah was taught to read, though according to her mother, Leah cried through much of the lessons.

Leah expressed her feelings of failure, her inability to feel aggressive toward anyone but herself, confusion, insomnia, insecurity, depression, loneliness, agoraphobia, and desperation. Religion and a maternal friend were her only comforts. I encouraged her to seek help after the interview. She went to a Christian minister recommended by her church. The minister was helpful but left after about a year. Again, with further encouragement, she followed through with the Christian psychiatric group she thought could help her. With the help of this group’s therapist who told Leah she had prayed for her needs to be taken care of, Leah spent 3 months receiving total care in a hospital and is now home, much improved in feelings about herself and her future. She is presently enrolled in a small-business course in order to operate eventually a small food business.

In her interview, Leah described herself as a hidden person. In her entire life, she had never discussed her concentration camp and orphanage past with anyone. Carrying a tremendous burden of shame for who she was and how she felt, she experienced herself as powerless and at the mercy of others. This burden was further increased by her supplicant victim relationship with the German government to whom she had to present herself yearly in order to receive a pension. To get psychiatric help was an ordeal of outright retraumatization; she had to appear before a German government-appointed psychiatrist who spoke with a German accent, in order to have him, as she put it, “decide what he wants.” Prior to her breakdown, she had been denied intensive psychiatric help but given permission for two visits a month for medication. Her claim for more help and a larger pension were denied, as her difficulties were deemed “related to her present family life—not to her war experience.”

In her interview, she was confronted with the depth of her own misery as well as the vague possibility that she deserved better. My continued interest and respect for her struggle have contributed to her recognition that she is worthy and justified in getting help for
herself and fighting the German bureaucracy for that help. The cruelty and indifference of that system is illustrated by the fact that, in order to receive compensation for her hospitalization, she was recently ordered to appear again before the same German psychiatrist who had previously twice denied her and with whom she felt frightened and confused.

Asked on her update questionnaire if her understanding of herself changed as a result of her interviews, she answered that she learned not to "hate myself so hard; it was no fault of mine that I had to go through this. The blame wasn't on me." No small achievement for someone for whose suffering the German government seeks to deny responsibility by projecting the blame on her "family life."

The reverberations of these four follow-up interviews were each different and unique to the person. Each one of the four focused a need, then carried forward on some path to solution. Jack began the work of reality testing to determine whether any fragment of his idealized dead mother existed. He found nothing after doing all the work of searching and grieving; while the pain of loss is still there and always will be, now there is also resignation. However, he found a more forgiving adoptive mother in reality and a readiness within himself to feel more for her.

Bella focused on the unfinished work of understanding and forgiving herself for feelings of rebellion against her adoptive parents. She therefore could begin to consider revealing her real identity to her children without feeling it would destroy her adoptive parents.

Berl came into contact with the deprivation of love he suffered throughout his childhood. He began to see himself more clearly as a casualty of the Nazi era, to forgive himself for not being loved then, and to find some compensation in the present through a loving wife and a new family.

Leah permitted herself to face her intense need for psychological help and the right to a more psychically comfortable life. The regression that was apparent in the interview, where her need was revealed for a familiar adult in an English hospital (she still spoke German). No wonder she was, according to Alice Goldberger, difficult to handle. Her ways of asserting herself—by being clingy and whiney on return from her surgery—were too much for her caretakers. "Her nose was always running, they did not like her," Alice Goldberger said. One sees a negative cycle of escalating frustration for Leah and her caretakers. Her aggressive attempts to get attention from peers were also rebuffed.

Berl, too, presented some similar difficulties. He had had most difficulty separating from the group and had periods of compulsive thumb sucking of a bib and masturbating in which "his whole environment, including the other children (and the adults), lost significance for him." He had crying spells and food refusals. He was seen as deeply disturbed. We do not know what Sister Gertrude's reaction was when, at around age 3½, he wanted her to kiss his penis, but one can guess. (How much more valuable all child observations would be if they were accompanied by a running self-description on the part of the observing adult?) Later on, an area in which he might have gotten special appreciation for ingeniousness from adults, i.e., taking things apart, was not valued as a sign of budding mechanical ability by the women who cared for him (there being no men) but was seen as destructive.

In contrast, both Bella and Jack were described as physically attractive. Bella was "a pretty, plump child with red hair and a ready smile." Jack's beautiful curly hair was greatly admired. He was so attractive that Alice tells of being outraged by one adult coming to Lingfield who walked in, looked over the room full of playing children and said, "I'll take that one with the curly hair." Both Jack and Bella had traits admired
by their caretakers and other children. Jack was thought to be sensitive and concerned for the feelings of others. He made attachments and mourned them when broken. Bella was seen as having an uncanny ability to get others to do things for her. Her independence, though difficult at times, was appreciated by the adults. These children had ways of assertion that did not overtax the resources of their caretakers and in addition were thought to be clever by the adults; i.e., when Jack says, “Naughty boy Gertrude,” to his caretaker, he expresses negative feelings in a way that is not only tolerable but thought charming enough to record.

Vulnerability and resilience over the life span is an area of study in its infancy. Investigators are now researching those factors that protect children from risk (Garmezy, 1984; Garmezy and Rutter, 1984; Werner and Smith, 1982). Those child survivors who are now in their mid-forties to mid-fifties have much to contribute, particularly to the study of resilience. Fortunately, they were unaware of the dark predictions made for them by the knowledgeable professionals. Many made adaptions that are not only impressive but inspiring. Surely we cannot afford to continue to ignore the rich instructive treasure of their lives.

References


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