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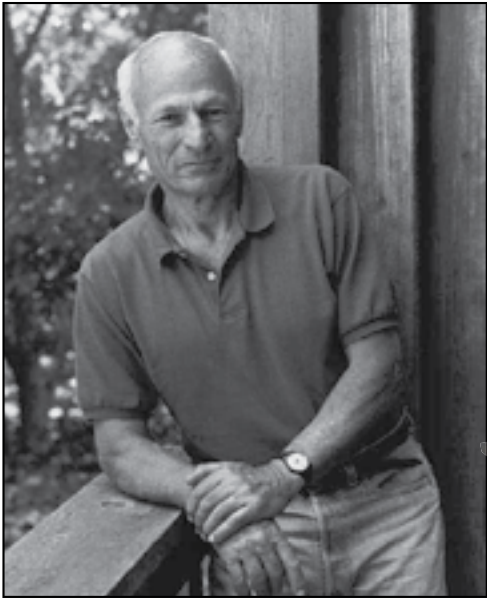
MARIN'S BEST EVERY WEEK

FEBRUARY 29 - MARCH 6, 2008

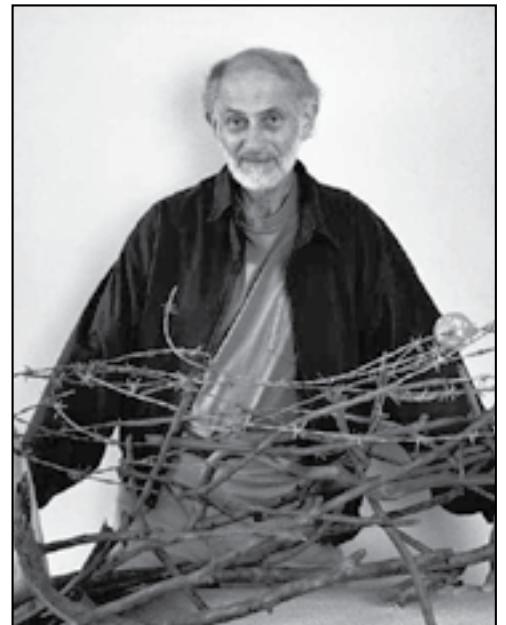
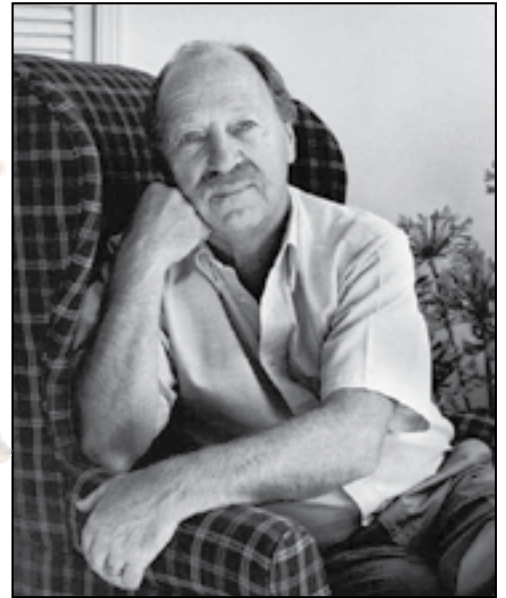


Inverness photographer's
portrait exhibit
of Holocaust survivors
helps ensure
we never forget...
[P.16]

EISEN'S LIST



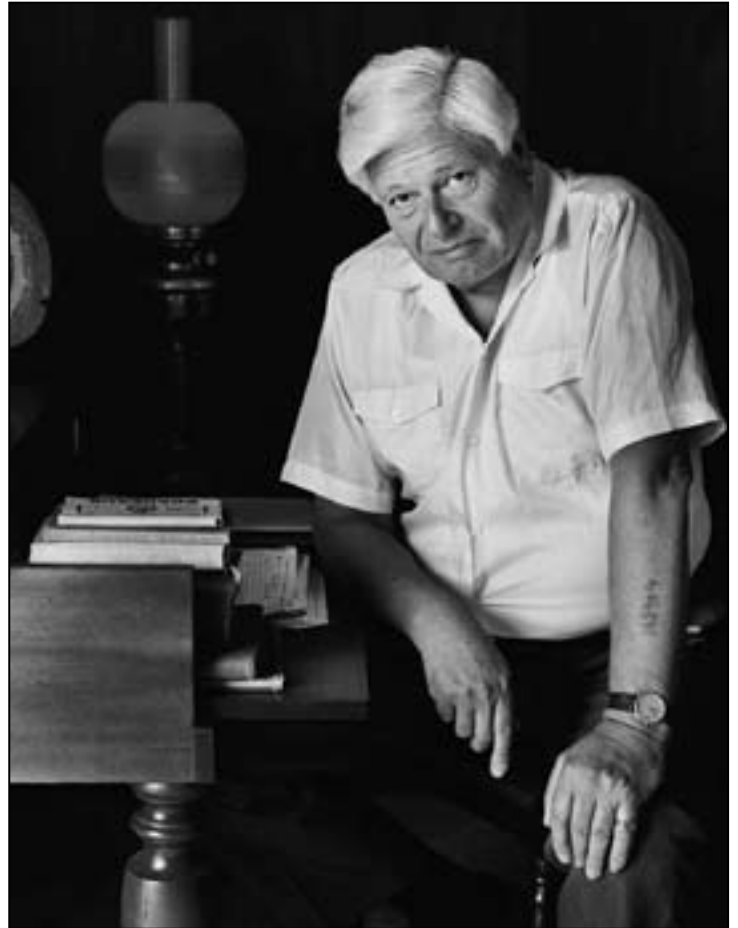
“ Listen. This is important. This is what happened to me and to my family. It should not be forgotten. ”





PICTURES worth six million WORDS

**Holocaust survivors stare down the ghosts
of the past in new exhibit at Osher Marin JCC**



The exhibit features several Marin Holocaust survivors. Pictured, above, John Steiner, and opposite page clockwise from upper left: Erica Meier, Andre Gabany, Alan Peters, Karel Langer, Richard Kimelman, Lotte Stein, Roma Barnes and John Franklin.

*Though I'm a refugee instead of, strictly speaking, a Holocaust survivor, I'm one of the subjects, together with my brother and my late mother, of Evvy Eisen's *Multiply by Six Million* exhibit, and one of the narrators in the film. Evvy Eisen and I have been friends for about 15 years. It is with pleasure that I tell the story of the creation of her moving exhibit.*

In 1992, in connection with her son David's eighth-grade project on the Holocaust, Evvy Eisen got the names of four Holocaust survivors to photograph.

That was about 200 survivors ago. "I just couldn't stop," says Inverness resident Eisen.

Thirty-seven of her 11-by-14-inch black-and-white portraits of survivors—all of them Bay Area residents—will be exhibited in a show titled *Multiply by Six Million* at the Osher Marin Jewish Community Center beginning March 1.

Framed with each portrait will be accounts of the subject's wartime experiences (edited from their original narratives), an album of additional portraits, a selection of books written by survivors Eisen has photographed and, showing continuously, a 25-minute film, also called *Multiply by Six Million*, composed of the portraits and excerpts from the subjects' narratives. The exhibit is the first in a multi-year tour arranged by the California Exhibition Resources Alliance, an organization that helps create and tour smaller exhibits that enhance human understanding.

Eisen hasn't "found" her subjects by advertising or seeking them out. "Somebody

would know somebody, or they would see an article about the project" (formerly called *The Legacy Project*), Eisen says. "I had no idea that this would grow." It has expanded even to France, where Eisen has photographed about half of her subjects.

Evvy Eisen was born in Brooklyn on Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945—and went to the same Brooklyn high school as Woody Allen (though a lot later), and then to Brooklyn College. Her interest in photography was spurred by a visit to New York's Museum of Modern Art, where she saw an exhibition of black-and-white photographs. "I never saw anything like them in my life," Eisen recalls. "I had no idea

of what was possible in photography." Living in New York, riding the subway, Eisen loved looking at the many faces, and that is why, she says, she has never been interested in photographing anything but people.

In 1966, Eisen came to San Francisco as a Vista volunteer, working at the city jail to help get prisoners released on their own recognizance. In the meantime, she enrolled in photography classes at

UC Berkeley Extension, attended workshops and went to hear talks by prominent photographers. Eventually, she herself was teaching at UC Extension and then at The Darkroom in San Rafael, of which she was one of the founders, together with her film's assistant project director, San Rafael resident Doug Neecke.

by RENATA POLT

PORTRAITS OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

by EVVY EISEN

SHOWING SOON

Multiply by Six Million will be on display at the JCC through May 1. An opening reception for the exhibit will be held at the Bernard Osher Marin Jewish Community Center's Isaacs Gallery, 200 N. San Pedro Road, San Rafael, on March 6 at 6:30pm. Nicole Milner, composer of the soundtrack for the film, will perform. Admission is free.



ROBERT VENTURA

In May, the Sundance Channel will begin showing the documentary of 'Multiply by Six Million.' Above, Eisen is flanked by the film's co-producer Kelly Hendricks, left, and production coordinator Doug Neecke.

< **17 Pictures worth six million words**

Eisen's very first survivor subject was John Steiner, professor emeritus at Sonoma State University and founding director of the university's Holocaust Studies Center—and his portrait remains among the most affecting. Steiner, white-haired and powerful-looking, leans on a desk and gazes skeptically at the viewer, his left arm with its vividly tattooed concentration camp number propped in front of him.

Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Steiner was among the thousands who were transported to the camps in boxcars. "Those on the bottom were the worst off. They had to support the weight of all the bodies piled on top of them. Most were crushed or suffered an agonizingly slow death by suffocation," he writes in his autobiography. After the war, Steiner returned to Europe and interviewed former members of the SS and the Wehrmacht (the Nazi army).

Other photographs also show their subject's numbers, the ones the Nazis tattooed on the camp inmates' arms for identification. Martin Kahane thrusts his arm forward, as if to challenge anyone who would doubt what happened to him. "My two brothers and I stood together and were tattooed with consecutive numbers. We were the only ones [of our family] who survived." Perhaps the no-nonsense attitude reflected on his face was a help.

Another concentration camp "souvenir" is Sam Reselbach's striped Auschwitz jacket, which he wears in his portrait. During the rain, he recalls, he would put empty cement bags under it to stay dry.

Eisen has photographed couples and siblings as well as individuals. Her subjects have included physicians (Stella and Elie Jacques Tennenbaum), artists (Ruth Geoffrey, photographed surrounded by her paintings; and Richard Kimmelman, shown with one of his sculptures that includes barbed wire, which a visit to Jerusalem's Holocaust museum inspired him to use); engineers, professors, a photographer, a caterer and scores of others. There's late congressman and human rights champion Tom Lantos, the only Holocaust survivor ever to serve in Congress, and his wife Annette.

In all the portraits, Eisen's subjects look straight into the camera's lens. Some survived the camps; others survived by hiding their identities or being hidden by sympathetic gentiles. Some children were shipped

to England at the beginning of the war on the *Kindertransports*, often never to see their parents again. Some, like my family, got out in time.

Only one of Eisen's subjects is not a Holocaust survivor: Knud Dyby, an avid recreational sailor in his youth, helped ferry more than 2,000 Jews, as well as saboteurs working against the Nazis, refugees and 30 downed Allied airmen, to safety from his native Denmark to Sweden. In 2007, Dyby, a Marin County resident, was named a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority.

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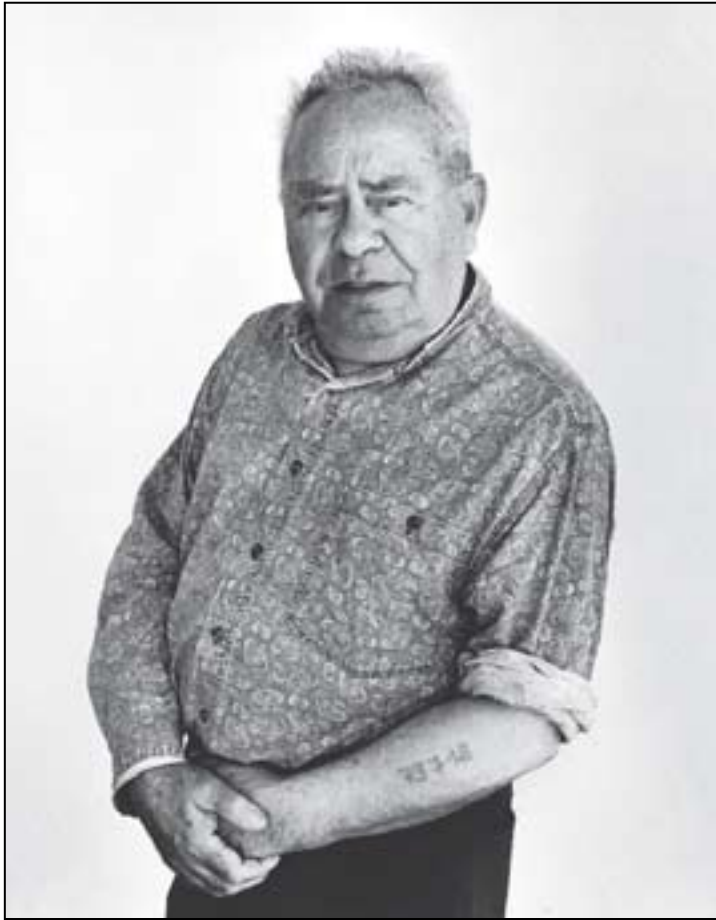
HAVING ONE'S PORTRAIT made by Evvy Eisen is a multistep process. In a first meeting, Eisen meets her subject and gets to know him or her, shows samples of her photographs, explains how she works and discusses possible backgrounds for the shoot. "A big part of the project is that we get to know each other before the photography takes place," she says.

Many people want to be photographed with objects that are meaningful to them: a menorah rescued from the Holocaust, a photograph of a loved one, a photo album that is the only thing left of one survivor's past. My mother wanted us to be photographed in front of a tapestry of a map of the world that hung in her apartment, because she felt it symbolized the route of our travels, from Czechoslovakia, to Switzerland, to Cuba and finally to the United States.

A date is set for the photo shoot, and then Eisen shows up with her equipment—a 6-by-7 Pentax medium-format camera and a tripod, but no lights: All the photography is done by natural light. She works slowly, taking her time to discover how she can best express the person's character.

Then comes the darkroom work. "I *love* to work in the darkroom," says Eisen, slender, dark-haired and with intense, dark eyes. She works only in black-and-white. And, no, she doesn't own a digital camera.

After the prints are made, Eisen pays another visit to her subjects, presenting them with a copy of the print. In the case of her French subjects, there's been a one-year hiatus between the photography sessions and the print presentation, because Eisen developed and printed the film after she got home to Inverness and then presented them on her next summer's visit. "I never



Martin Kahane: 'My two brothers and I stood together and were tattooed with consecutive numbers. We were the only ones [of our family] who survived.'

wanted to mail the pictures," she explains.

As part of the process, Eisen asks her subjects to write about their own experiences. "I don't interview people," she says. "They have to write it." The results vary from a couple of paragraphs to one account running 70 pages. The accounts accompanying the photographs in the exhibit are excerpted from these narratives.

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WHILE EISEN'S FIRST subjects all came from the Bay Area, in 1998 she started photographing survivors in Paris as well. A student of French since high school, Eisen and her husband, Wes Sokolosky, were planning a vacation in France when a woman in her College of Marin French class mentioned that she had a cousin, a survivor, living in Paris.

At the time, nobody was doing work of this sort in France, and Eisen looked up the woman's cousin. This person in turn took her to the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation), where she was asked whether she would be willing to photograph other survivors. Because she could communicate with them in French—which, for many, was their second language—the project was possible. The subjects wrote their accounts in French, which was translated into English by volunteers. Eisen's vacation stretched into six weeks; she has returned annually to continue her work.

Exhibits of Evvy Eisen's photographs have been held at colleges and universi-

ties including St. Mary's College, Skyline College, Chapman University, Stanford University and Diablo Valley College, as well as at the Hamilton Field Exhibit Space, the Gallery at Toby's (Point Reyes Station), the Jewish Community Library (San Francisco), San Francisco's Alliance Française and Santa Clara's de Saisset Museum (along with Michael Kenna's "Impossible to Forget: The Nazi Camps Fifty Years After"). In addition, the photographs are included in the permanent collections of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D.C.), the Simon Wiesenthal Center (Los Angeles) and the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (Paris).

But exhibitions and archives reach only a limited number of people, and Eisen wanted her work to be seen more widely. That was why she thought of creating a film as a culmination of the 15-year project and then making a DVD of the film.

"A few people will get to see an exhibit. But a DVD is a portable, affordable, usable record of this project," she says.

Eisen was encouraged to make her film by San Anselmo resident Kelly Hendricks, a former neighbor, who became Eisen's co-producer, director and film editor. Hendricks, who, like most people, had never met a Holocaust survivor, is an Emmy-winning film editor currently working at CNET.

The film consists of the photographs of 40 Bay Areas survivors, with narrators reading short selections from each person's autobiography as the camera moves

< 19 Pictures worth six million words

seamlessly into and out of the pictures. It is divided into three sections: "Destruction and Loss," "Lives Rebuilt" (which simply states the survivor's career after his or her arrival in the United States, without narration) and "Reflections."

A haunting piano score excerpted from two of her CDs is provided by Nicole Milner, a survivor whom Eisen has also photographed.

It took a year to make the dream a reality, and it will have been another year to "get it out into the world," says Eisen. Now, *Multiply by Six Million* has been accepted by the Sundance Channel for broadcast during a period of two years beginning this May and will also be offered by Sundance as video on demand. (The DVD is also available for purchase from multiplybysixmillion@yahoo.com, and Eisen is seeking a distributor.)

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FOR MOST OF the 15 years that Evvy Eisen has been photographing survivors, she has worked independently and as a volunteer—i.e., footing much of the bill. More recently, partial funding for the film has been provided by the Koret Foundation and by the California Stories Initiative of the California Council for the Humanities. The Osher Marin Jewish Community Center exhibit and the film were partially underwritten by the Helen and Sanford Diller Supporting Foundation of the Jewish Community Federation as well as by individual donors. And Mercy High School, a San Francisco Catholic girls' school, has been instrumental both in grant-getting and premiering the film for its students.

Which plays into one of Eisen's major objectives: to get the film into the schools. "The exhibit and the film—they're not solely a Jewish thing—they're the story of people who suffered because they were considered to be different. Because of that, the pictures and the film have been very meaningful to students who may have experienced discrimination themselves. The message of tolerance can be applied to many groups." Eisen hopes that her work can play a part in the California public schools' requirement to study the Holocaust.

"The Holocaust has been represented primarily by images that portray the scale of a tragedy so large that many are unable to comprehend it," says Eisen, quoting Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann's famous statement: "One hundred dead is a catastrophe. Five million dead is a statistic." Even if Eichmann was off by about a million, he got the idea: People have trouble fathoming statistics, whereas individual experiences speak to us all. "There is a need to present this history on a human level promoting the understanding that it happened to individuals like ourselves," says Eisen. Or, as the end quote on the film says, "Listen. This is important. This is what happened to me and to my family. It should not be forgotten."

But it's not just the public service aspect of her project that Evvy Eisen has enjoyed. "To meet these people and have a part in making sure their story will live on has been a real honor. For many people, it was the first time they decided to share their story—and it was not easy for some of them. The people I've met have been extraordinary individuals. I've learned a lot. It's been a real honor to do this work." *