

FINDING KALMAN: A Boy in Six Million

by Roz Jacobs and Anna Huberman Jacobs

Book Discussion and Activity Guide, Grades 6–12

Synopsis

“I felt like my feet were burning,” Anna Huberman Jacobs says, describing the day in 1945 that she went back to her home in Włocławek, Poland. Anna had survived life in the Warsaw ghetto, escape, imprisonment at a Nazi labor camp, and near starvation in post-Liberation Poland. On returning home, Anna learned that she was the sole survivor of her family. It was the worst day of her life. For Anna, finding Kalman that day meant leaving Włocławek with a photograph of her brother that a neighbor’s child had pulled from the garbage. It was the only remainder of her family’s personal belongings. Left with just memories and the single photo, Anna began her new life.

Years later, the image of Kalman, forever a child in the photograph, captured the imagination of Anna’s daughter Roz, a curious, artistic child who wanted to know every detail of the story that her mother was clearly not completely sharing with her. For Roz as a child, finding Kalman meant gazing at his image, fantasizing that she would bring this lost brother back to her mother. As an adult, finding Kalman was discovering his identity in every brushstroke as Roz worked to recapture his essence over and over again on her canvas and in the creation of a multimedia artwork: *The Memory Project*.

Finding Kalman: A Boy In Six Million weaves Anna’s story of escape and survival with Roz’s desire to have a purposeful life, to answer destruction through the act of creating. Kalman’s voice, though silenced, remains loud in the lives of both mother and daughter in this story of memory, self-discovery and creation.

Before You Read

You may want to review some key events in the history of the Nazi invasion of Poland. Hitler had signed a nonaggression pact with Poland when he came to power in Germany in 1934. In the summer of 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union negotiated the German-Soviet Pact, which divided Poland between the two countries. At that time, there were approximately 3.3 million Jewish people living in Poland. One month later, German forces invaded the parts of Poland they had been given in the pact. They defeated the Polish army in a matter of weeks. Most of the 1.8 million Jews that lived in those parts were soon imprisoned in ghettos.

In June 1941, the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union and occupied the parts of Poland that had been under Soviet rule. Jewish people in Poland were then deported to concentration and slave labor camps. In December of that year, Jewish people in the Lodz ghetto were killed in trucks using poisonous gas. A few months later, Polish Jews began to be murdered systematically in the concentration camp Auschwitz. Throughout 1942, the Germans deported masses of Jewish people from the Polish ghettos, where they were sent to their deaths at concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka. The Nazis remained in control of Poland until January 1945, when the Red Army liberated the camps. By the end of the war, almost 90% of Poland’s Jewish population had been murdered by the Nazis.