

# **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 Łódź 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.

## **Responding to the Book Through Discussion**

1. What is the effect of having the story told by two narrators?
2. How do you think Anna felt when, as a child, Roz asked her questions about her past? Has there ever been anything you didn't want to share with someone you love because it is too painful?
3. Roz says that her mother's stories have a physical connection to her. What are the physical aspects of your family memories? How do they sound, feel, smell, look, taste?
4. Compare and contrast Roz's life as a teenager with her mother's. Do you think you would be able to leave your family at a young age if it was your only hope to survive? Why or why not?
5. Anna was furious that Roz wanted to quit school in order to study art with a teacher she'd met, while Roz thought it was the perfect plan. Have you ever disagreed with your family on a major life decision? How did you resolve it?
6. Discuss the concept of art telescoping time. What work of art—a painting, a book, a movie, etc.—represents this concept best to you?
7. On page 33, Anna describes her first kiss with her future husband. It takes place in an ammunition factory at a forced labor camp. Can you think of any other examples, either in your own life or other books you have read, of normal life continuing among tragic circumstances?
8. What is the picture of Kalman you have at the end of the story? How has it changed from when you first started the book?
9. Do you believe it is human instinct to return to hatred, bigotry, and war? How do you personally combat these instincts?
10. Do you think the world is a terrible, dark place? Why or why not?

## **Responding to the Book Through Writing**

1. Talk to a parent, grandparent, or another adult about what life was like when they were your age. What are some similarities and differences in your lives? After you've gathered the information, write two diary entries, one with each of you as narrator.
2. Check out the stories on The Memory Project ID Cards (available for download at [memoryprojectproductions.org](http://memoryprojectproductions.org)). Choose one and write a letter to the person on the card, telling why his or her story was meaningful to you.
3. Write about someone or something that you lost that can never be replaced. How will you keep that memory alive? Write a poem or a short story about it.

## **Additional Reading**

### **Fiction**

*Daniel Half Human: and the Good Nazi* by David Chotjewitz. (Grade 7-up)

*Escaping into the Night* by Dina D. Friedman. (Grade 6-10)

*Someone Named Eva* by Joan M. Wolf. (Grades 5-8)

*Stones from the River* by Ursula Hegi. (Grades 9-up)

*The Thought of High Windows* by Lynn Kositsky. (Grades 8-up)

### **Nonfiction**

*A Voice from the Holocaust* by Eve Nussbaum Soumerai. (Grades 6-9)

*The Jewish Victims of the Holocaust* by Linda Jacobs Altman. (Grades 5-10)

*Living in Nazi Germany* by Elaine Halleck.

*Saving Children from the Holocaust: The Kindertransport* by Ann Byers (Grades 5 and up)

*Martyrs to Madness: The Victims of the Holocaust* by Ted Gottfried. (Grades 7 and up)

*The Color of Water* by James McBride

## **Internet Resources**

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <http://www.ushmm.org>

Yad Vashem <http://yadvashem.org>

The History Place: Holocaust Timeline

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>

The Holocaust: A Tragic Legacy

<http://library.thinkquest.org/12663/>

Bibliography.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005070>