Missing Pieces

By,

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The title of my senior thesis project, Missing Pieces, came about late in my project's timeline. Once all of my images were sequenced, I realized there was still so much missing information when it came to the members of my family who were persecuted and many of them murdered, during the events of WWII and the Holocaust. This project began on my eighteenth birthday, I recall telling my mom that I was using color film in my high school photography class. My mom immediately proceeded to lead me down to our basement to open a neglected closet. Inside the closet was a bin filled to the top with carousels of color slide film made by my great-grandfather, Meier Jacob. I began to sort through the images during my downtime. Eventually I started to scan the film and realized I did not recognize many of the people in the photographs. I soon realized the fate of many of my family members, murdered in the horrific events of the Holocaust in WWII. In this essay, I am going to discuss my family's roots, which includes luck but misfortune, along with the indelible damage the Holocaust has on my family history, and the artists who have inspired me along the way.

Growing up, I was raised Catholic, but we always celebrated Hanukkah and Passover at my Aunt Lorie's house since I could remember. The fact that I was being raised Catholic but also celebrated Jewish holidays seemed so foreign to those who would ask me what my religion was. I realized later in life that being raised like this was not "typical," but nevertheless, it was a product of combined family traditions, values and histories. When I was young, I never asked about our family history. As far as nationality went, all I knew was that we were Russian and Irish. As I grew older, I kept wondering what my family history was, and it always seemed incredibly mysterious. I would often ask my friends about their own family histories, and it felt like most knew every single detail. This was an intense contrast to my own family, whose lineage and storyline I felt I knew nothing of. When I was twenty years old, I found out that my grandmothers' side of the

family were Holocaust survivors. This information was told to me by my grandmother, after many years of me asking her she reluctantly, told me our family's unfortunate background, my grandmother did not like to talk about our family's history due to the horrific details of our past. My great-grandfather, Meier Jacob immigrated to the United states in 1938, alone. He had five siblings who stayed in their home country, Germany. Once in America, Meier communicated with this three youngest siblings Ilse, Manfred and Ferdinand by writing letters to them trying to convince them to come to America. Meier's older sister, Hanna fled to London to get married. Simon, his other younger brother, fled to Israel to escape persecution. As time passed, Meier was unable to contact his youngest siblings, who were unable to escape from Germany, he soon realized that he would never hear from them again.

Meier spent the next fifty-six years writing inquiry letters to the United States Army and the Red Cross International Association trying to get information about the whereabouts of his youngest siblings. My great-grandfather never knew where his siblings ended up, as the letter from the Red Cross stating their last known whereabouts came to my house a month after he passed away. In this letter it stated that his youngest siblings Ilse, Manfred and Ferdinand were murdered during the Holocaust. As stated in the Red Cross Documents we received in 1997, Ilse was around 20 years old at her last known location, Manfred was around 15 years old at his last known location, and Ferdinand was around 12 years old at his last known location.

During the Holocaust over six million Jewish people were murdered, my great aunt and uncles have found their way into this statistic. The loss of the family I will never meet has haunted me as I have learned their stories. "In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe stood at over nine million…By the end of the war in 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution."" (USHMM,

Introduction) According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the last refugee camp for Jewish displaced persons closed in 1957, 63 years ago. Though there are more than 250,000 Holocaust survivors, this statistic will never compare to the nearly six million people who were murdered over the span of twelve years. “All told it is thought that 11 million people perished in the Holocaust, 6 million were Jews, but the others were people with disabilities, gypsies, people who identified as homosexual, Jehovah’s Witnesses, German political opponents and prisoners of war.” (USHMM, Holocaust Encyclopedia).

In the photograph “Identification Card” is an image of my great-aunt Ilse who was given an identification card when she was in the concentration camps. The story in my family is that Ilse actually escaped one of the camps due to the fact that her job was a seamstress. The story goes that she cut a hole in the fence and ran for her life, however, we don’t know if this story is true or not. Unfortunately, she was captured again by the Nazi’s and was sent to another camp. Ilse was in one of the most known concentration camps, Auschwitz, where she, is now buried under the ground in an unmarked grave with millions of others.

There is another story that I was told by my cousin Jerry, who is Simon’s oldest son, that we have living relatives in Israel who escaped there shortly after the Nazi’s took power. The story goes that we have second or third cousins living in Israel under a different last name, we don’t know if they actually live there or if they are alive, there is rumors that these relatives are living under the name “Fuhrman”. The only thing that proves this story to be true is on my AncestryDNA results there is someone by the name of Maxine Fuhrman in my possible 3rd cousin DNA matches. I asked my relatives about Maxine and no one knew if this is the relatives who escaped to Israel.

For this project I looked to Terry Kurgan's "Everyone is Present" project which unpack her own families experience with the holocaust and how they flee Europe for Cape Town, Africa (Everyone is Present, 2019). This project helped me to realize that everyone's family experienced different struggles and essentially, has many different stories of both survival and terrible fates during the Holocaust. Kurgan's project helped me to understand my own family story and inspired me to go through my great-grandfather's journal that was written on his death bed.

As I kept photographing, I came across an exhibition that twelve different photographers were apart of called "This Place" during this project the photographers tackled ideas surrounding the politics in Israel and the West Banks. Through this project I discovered Frederick Brenner and his project "Diaspora" in which Brenner explored the Jewish diaspora over the span of twenty-five years, this project made me realize my own family's diaspora when being displaced from Germany. Shimon Attie's project "The Writing on the Wall" involves the Attie projecting images of pre-world war two photographs of Jewish street life in Berlin onto the same or nearby address where the photos were originally taken 60 years ago. (The Writing on the Wall, 2019) Attie's work inspired me to think about doing this in my own work as it relates to my family.

While researching my family, I found a large box in my attic of my childhood home, which my mom thought was gone forever. In this box we found a large envelope filled with handwritten letters that my great-grandfather wrote to his youngest siblings as well as the U.S. Army and the American Red Cross. In "Letters from Ilse and Manfred" the letters are handwritten on parchment paper that has lost its color and are illegible, and in German, which makes them untranslatable. My family became frustrated by this; we were so close to having new information about what happened to them. The image "We Found Them" is a photograph of the actual letters we received from the Red Cross International Association stating the last known location of Manfred, an

evacuation to Riga Ghetto in 1941. This letter came to my home about a month after Meier passed away, with Meier never knowing the fate of his youngest brother.

When my great-grandfather immigrated to America in 1938, he bought an apartment in Brooklyn, NY. Meier had a thick German accent but when asked his nationality he would say he was "American". Meier was traumatized by the events of his life. In the book Memory Effects, author Dora Apel, writes "the past dwells in the present in the lives of survivors." (Memory Effects, 2002)

Meier's older sister, Hanna, wound up getting a job in Egypt as a doctor and lived there for many years, her and her husband never came to America no matter how much Meier tried to convince her. Hanna wound up having two children, who were not told they had Jewish ancestors until they were twenty years old. Hanna's two daughters are still alive, they are both doctors living in Germany, they are the oldest members of that generation.

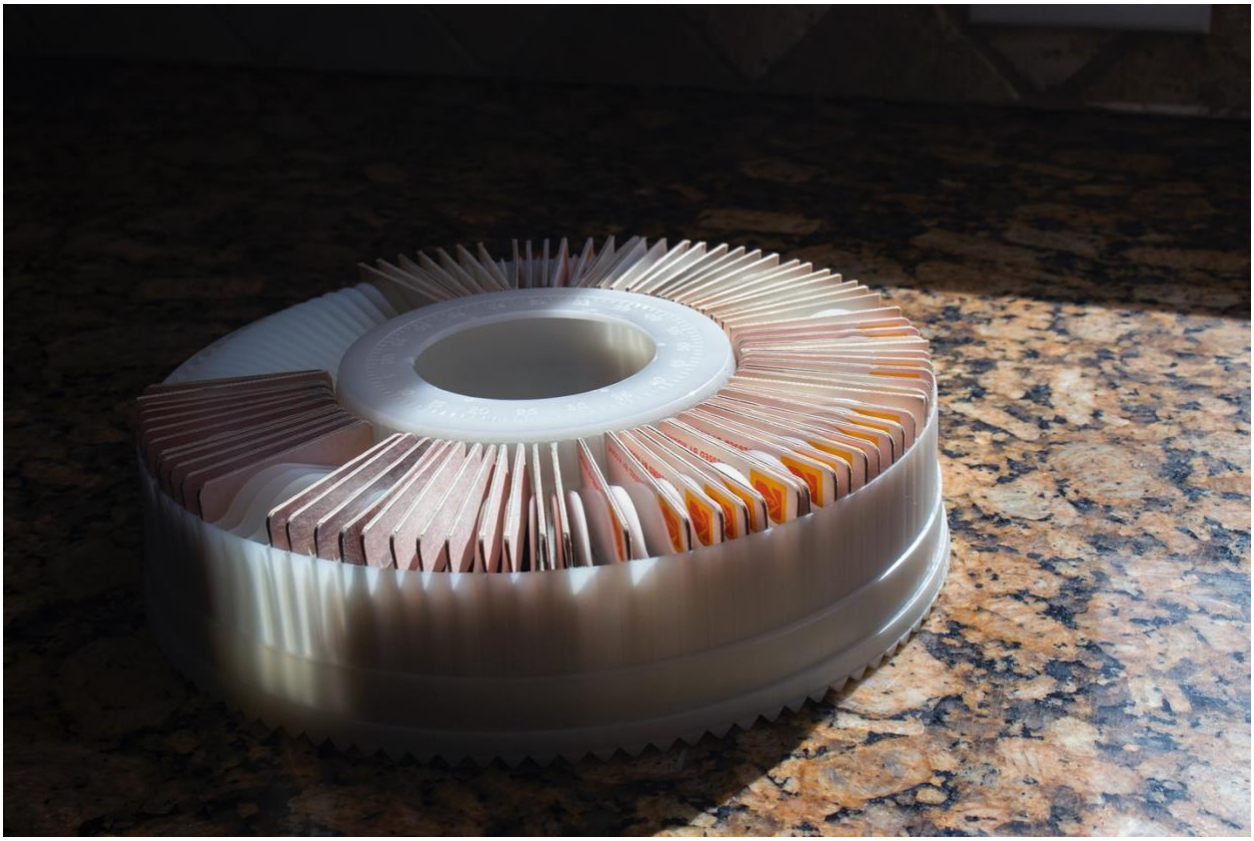
Meier's younger brother Simon escaped to Israel once the Nazi's took power in Germany. Simon stayed in Israel for many years, and his children were born there. Meier did not know he was an uncle until Simon reluctantly came to America with his children in the early 60s. My cousin Jerry, who is Simon's son, tells stories about how he remembers coming to America and meeting his uncle for the first time "I remember seeing Meier and my father telling me, "Jerry this is your uncle" and my world got a little bit bigger that day"". Jerry recently went to see Hanna's daughters in Germany and informed me they refused to speak about the family history, as it was too upsetting to recall what their mother had gone through.

Intergenerational trauma is something that also impacted my project since I heard the term during my sophomore year of college. There was a research project done in Australia where

psychologists interviewed Jewish grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, the results were as followed “The impact of their grandparents’ Holocaust experiences was found to echo across the participants’ affective experiences, their sense of connection to family histories, their understanding of being different to others.” (Cohn, 2017) This study has made me think of how my grandparent’s trauma with the Holocaust is likely been passed down to me and my siblings and how that trauma has affected our lives today.

72 years after the Holocaust, my family has been haunted by its events. There are many tales that we tell the younger generations, including many more that we are still learning. Unfortunately, there is no one person or even a document to prove these stories to be true. I always thought my family was small, until I learned that my family actually comes from 27 different countries. There are additional stories about my family changing their last name to escape the Nazi’s and the only thing that could prove that is the AncestryDNA test I took two years ago.

Like so many, my family members have become a number in the tragedy Holocaust stories and statistics however it is the story of my family that has inspired me to raise awareness about these horrific events. My Jewish lineage has become a bit of a weight due to the horrific past of the people in my family, including that of my great-grandfather Meier, who left this word never knowing the fate of his youngest siblings. I have dedicated this project to the Jacob family, to my Grandma Jackie, and any other member of my family who was murdered during this horrific event. For now, my family’s stories will remain scattered across generations and I will continue to pick up the missing pieces.



Color Slide Carousel

2020

19x27

Digital Photograph

The Jacob Family

2019

19x27

Digital Photograph

Looking to the Past

2019

19x27

Digital Photograph

Self Portrait with Color Slides

2020

19x27

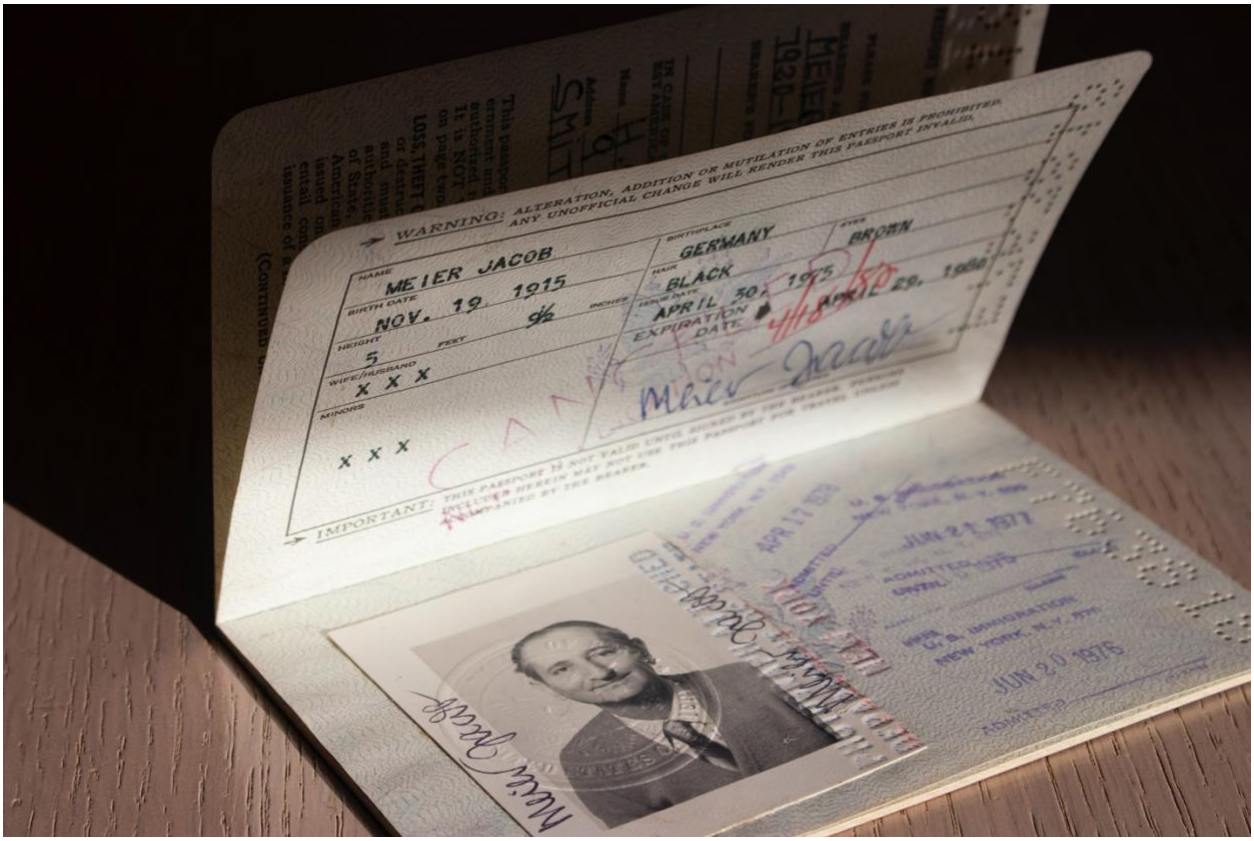
Digital Photograph

Searching for Clues

2019

19x27

Digital Photograph



Meier's Passport

2019

19x27

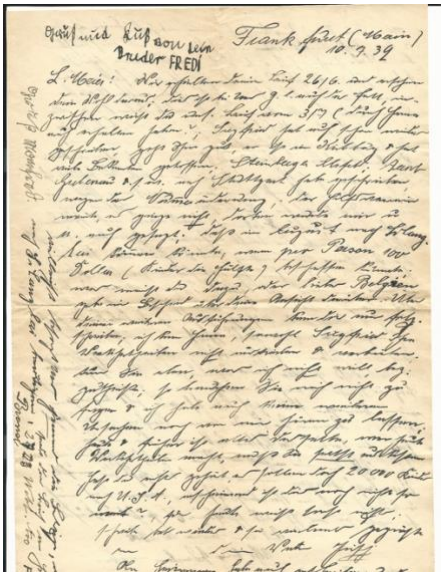
Digital Photograph

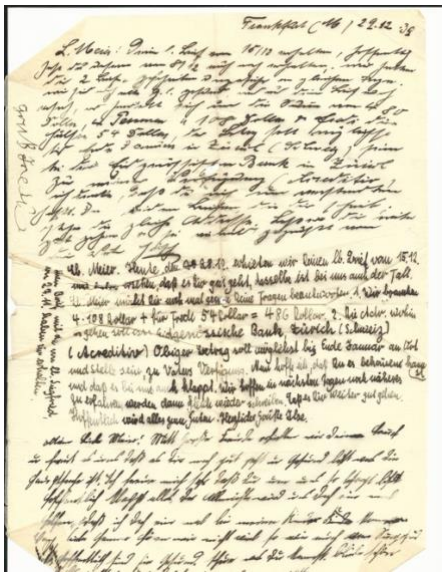
Identification Card

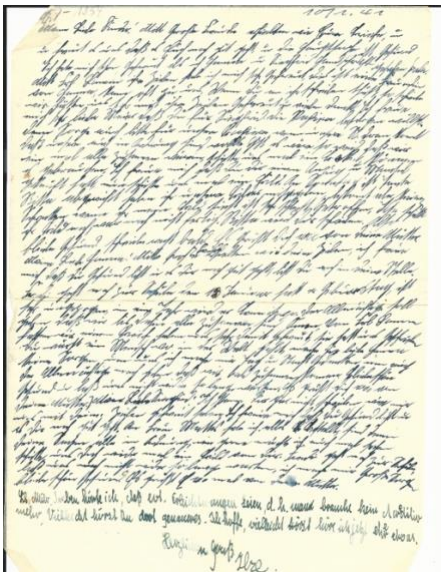
2019

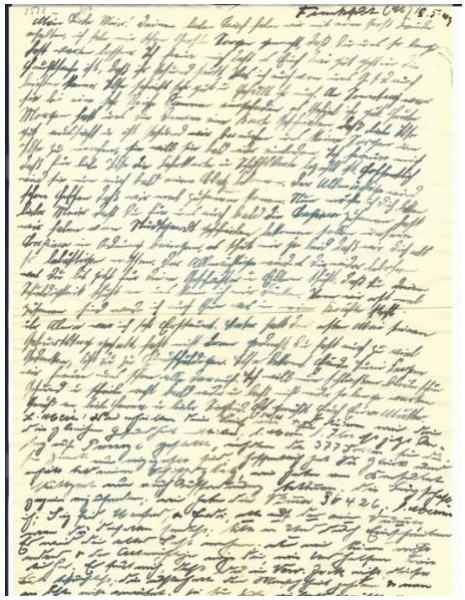
19x27

Digital Photograph







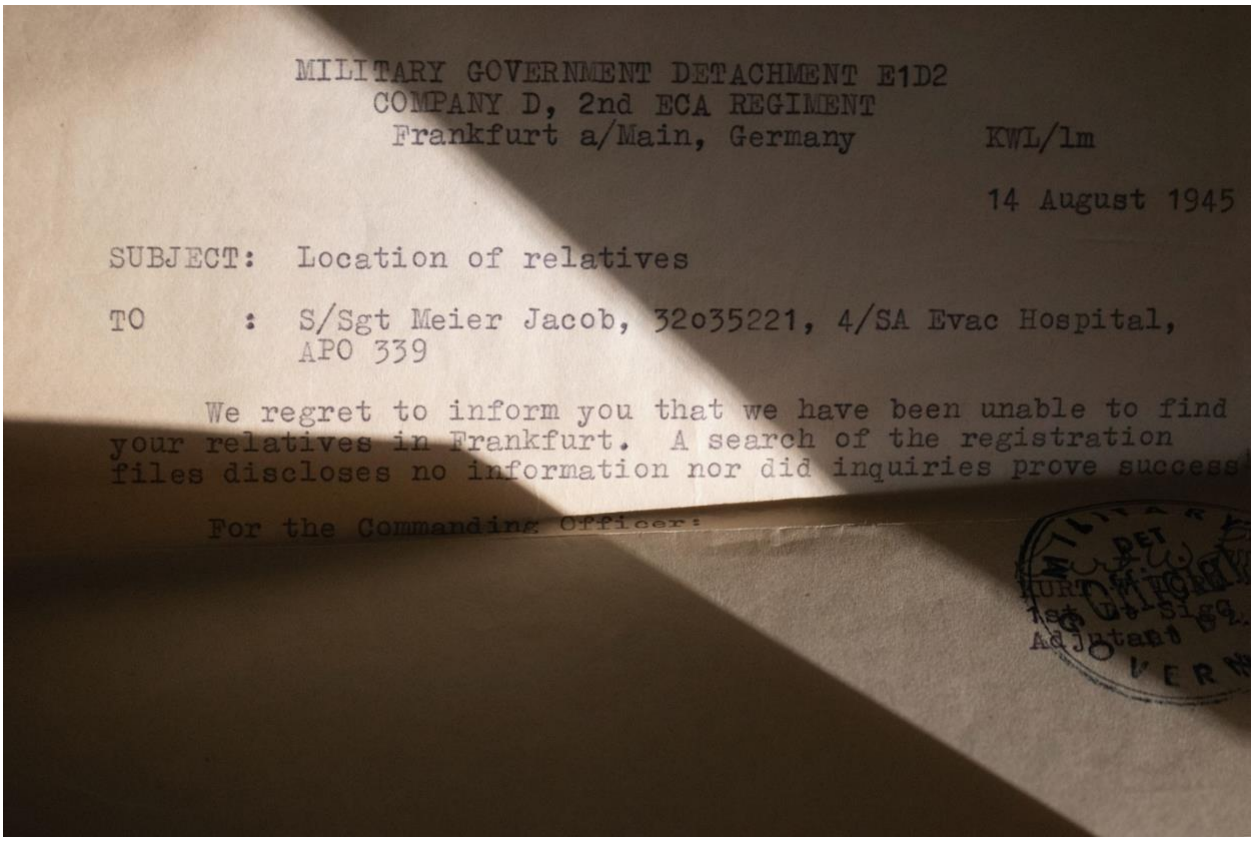


Letter's from Ilse and Manfred

2019

5x7

Digital Scan

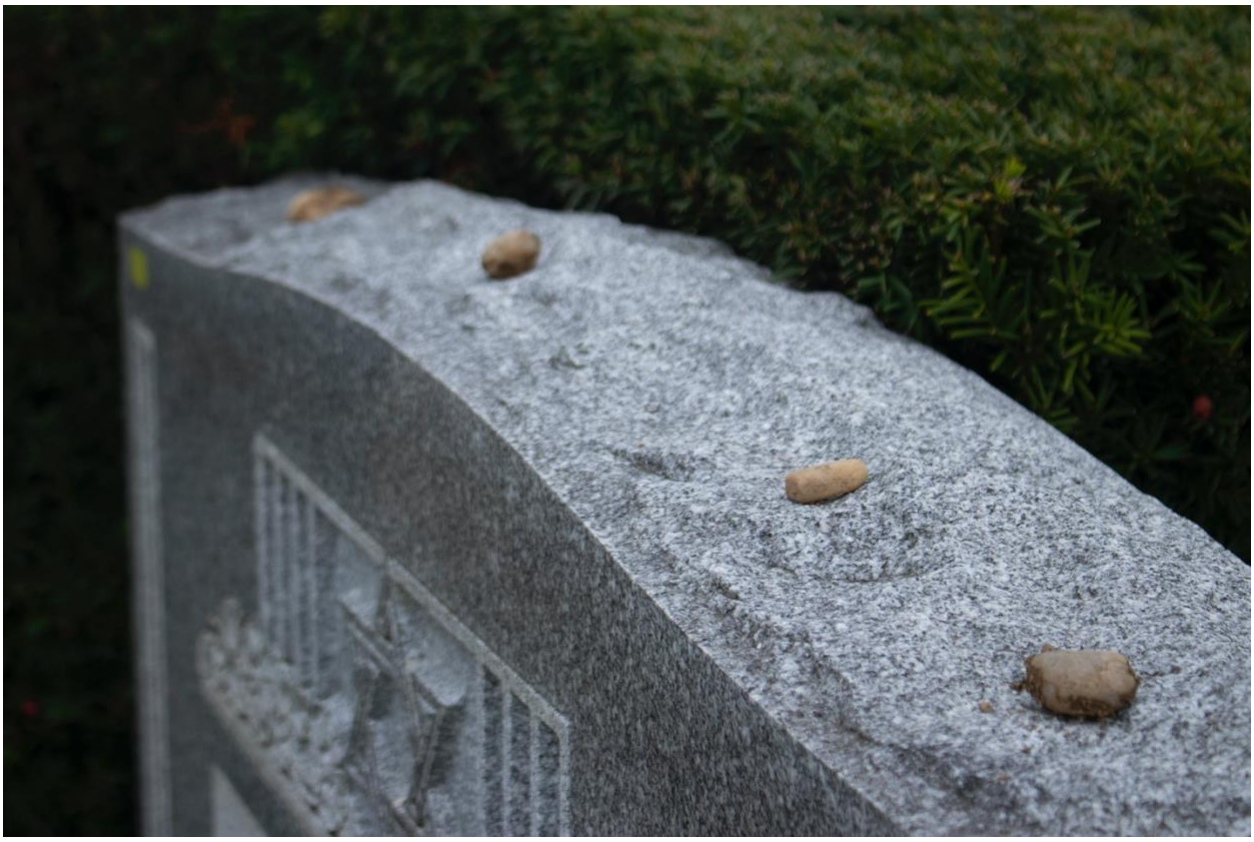


Frustration

2019

19x27

Digital Photograph

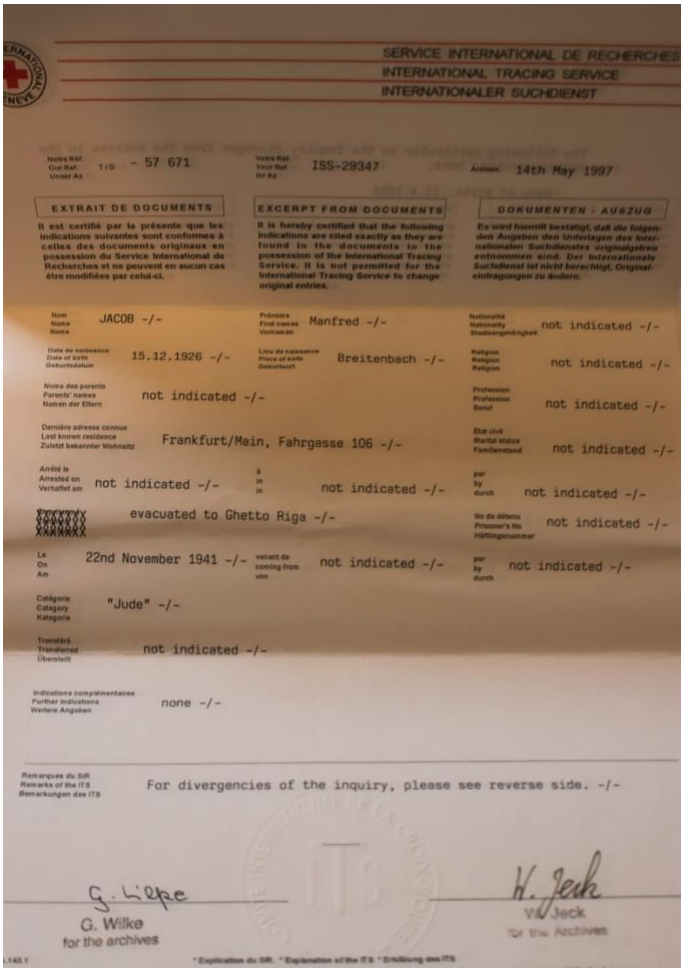


Remembrance

2019

19x27

Digital Photograph



We Found Them

2019

19x27

Digital Photograph

Meier’s Old Apartment Building

2020

19x27

Digital Photograph

This is for You

2020

19x27

Digital Photograph

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