

Survivors

Jews who survived the Holocaust period in Nazi-occupied Europe. It is obvious that Jews who managed to live through the mass exterminations carried out by the Nazis are "Survivors." However, sometimes the term Survivor also includes Jews who did not actually come into direct contact with the Nazi murder machine: some Jews fled Germany before the Nazis rose to national power; others escaped Germany after Adolf Hitler came to power but before he and the Nazis put the "final solution" into effect; while others were persecuted not by the Nazis themselves, but by the partners of the Nazis (in Nazi satellite countries or by Nazi collaborators). All of these are often considered to be "Survivors," as well.

Because it is difficult to define the term Survivor, it is extremely hard to say exactly how many Jews survived the Holocaust. It is possible, nonetheless, to make an estimation by working backwards. Right before the Nazis began carrying out the Final Solution, some 9.8 million Jews lived in areas dominated by the Nazis and their partners. Approximately six million of them were murdered, leaving less than four million Jews who could be considered Survivors.

Jews who survived the Holocaust carried the baggage of very painful memories, especially if their lives had been in direct danger or if they had lost family and friends. Despite this, many Survivors built new lives for themselves, establishing new families and careers. Some Holocaust Survivors have contributed much to society at large and have lived full post-Holocaust lives. However, there are also Survivors so haunted by their Holocaust experiences that they needed serious psychological help, and even then some could not move past their trauma.

For many years after World War II many Survivors felt that they could not describe their experiences to those who had not gone through the Holocaust. Some were able to record testimony about their experiences or publish their memoirs. The writing of such memoirs became more widespread during the 1970s, and continued to increase in the past two decades. These accounts are essential to our understanding of the Holocaust experience.

