

The power of pictures

After the Holocaust, a few treasured photos are only link to family

Rena Mann



Rena Mann at about 2 years old, with her mother, Gertrude Wollstein.



Mrs. Mann as a young girl with her award-winning dog, Ador.



Mrs. Mann at age 11 or 12, with her father, Leo Wollstein, in a 1938 photo. Below: Rena Mann today, and one of the postcards she received while she was in a concentration camp.



THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT



By **RYAN E. SMITH**
BLADE STAFF WRITER

When Aron Wajskol tries to picture his father, all that comes to mind is the face of a dying man.

"I can only picture him, that starved face in the ghetto. I wish I could picture him before the war," he said. "I can't."

Like so many Jews and others whose lives were nearly destroyed during the Holocaust, Dr. Wajskol has almost no reminders of his earlier life. No mementos. No family heirlooms. Hardly any tangible evidence of the past.

Many victims were forced to leave their homes with little more than a change of clothes. Now 85, Dr. Wajskol tried to escape with a photo of each of his parents — both of whom died during World War II — when he was deported to a concentration camp, but they were confiscated.

A mere accident of history preserved a glimpse of his mother from happier times. A cousin returned to Dr. Wajskol's house in Poland after the war and discovered a photograph of her. It's all the proof of her existence that he's got, and he's enlarged it by hand in a charcoal sketch that hangs in his West Toledo home.

■ **Survivors remember the Holocaust, Page A-1.**

A picture may seem like a small thing, but it can mean everything to someone whose past has been erased.

Clara Rona, 89, a survivor from Hungary who lives in West Toledo, lost nearly 60 relatives in the Holocaust, including her mother and father. It was only through the efforts of a neighbor that their images were saved from oblivion.

Norman Gudelman, 78, of Sylvania Township, had to rely on a relative to provide him with pictures of his parents. Orphaned as a youth when his family was forced on brutal marches between concentration camps, he had been able to take nothing with him.

For Rena Mann, who survived two concentration camps, such irreplaceable mementos can be double-edged swords.

"They mean a lot because that's my only link with the past," she said.

Thanks to a maid who saved some pictures, Mrs. Mann, of Sylvania Township, can see her parents, her award-winning dog, Ador, and even herself as a young girl. Each of them stand as proof that before the nightmare that was to come there was a loving family that was very real.

The 83-year-old holds equally precious the postcards she received from another relative while she was in one camp. She's glad she has all these, but they also take her back into a horrifying past.

"It's a remembrance of what I'd like to forget."

Contact Ryan E. Smith at:
ryansmith@theblade.com
or 419-724-6103.



For videos of local survivors, go to:

toledoblade.com

Aron Wajskol



Aron Wajskol has only one photo of his mother, Rachel, that was found by a cousin. Above is his charcoal sketch of the photo.



Clara Rona

Left: A photo of Clara Rona's parents, Joseph and Mary Schlesinger.



Left: Mrs. Rona, 89, has this photo of herself at age 5, before World War II.

BLADE PHOTOS/AMY E. VOIGT

Norman Gudelman

Mr. Gudelman with family photos, including the photo below, of his mother, Rina, father, Isaac, and aunt, Mariam.

THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER

