

**Reflections On Antisemitism  
(Rosh Hashanah 2021/5782)  
By Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch**

**“If there is one lesson to absorb from the Holocaust, it is that when someone proclaims an intention to exterminate the Jews, believe them,” says Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, recalling a harrowing story from Auschwitz this Rosh Hashanah. “The ideology of antisemitism focuses not on the Jewish person, but on the Jewish people; this is why it is so dangerous.”**

In the spring of 1987, George Klein, a brilliant Swedish microbiologist, embarked on a long journey from Europe to Vancouver, Canada. Klein was a prominent cancer specialist — professor of tumor biology at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, a chair created especially for him. He wrote or contributed to over one thousand research papers, and was the recipient of numerous awards for scientific excellence. Internationally recognized, Dr. Klein regularly attended conferences that brought together leading scientists in his field.

But his purpose in the spring of 1987 was not a medical convention. He was on a more personal mission. He wanted to meet Rudolf Vrba. Vrba was a professor of neuropharmacology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He, too, was a prolific researcher, publishing over fifty papers on brain chemistry, diabetes and cancer. But it was mere coincidence that the two were in overlapping fields. George Klein was drawn to Rudolf Vrba because of their overlapping histories. Klein had seen Vrba’s interview two years earlier in Claude Lanzmann’s film, “Shoah, “and it awakened in him deep and profound memories.

Forty-three years earlier, when George Klein was nineteen, he worked in the Jewish Council of Hungary in Budapest, the central agency of the Hungarian Jewish community. In May 1944, Klein happened upon a top-secret report describing what the Nazis planned for the Jews of Hungary. The deportations of Jews from the countryside was already in full force, and would soon commence in Budapest, itself. Hungarian Jews had no idea that their destination was Auschwitz, and that Auschwitz was a death camp. They assumed they were being relocated to labor camps to serve the German war effort.

The report that Klein held in his hand, however, told a different story. In dry matter-of-fact language, he learned of the mass killings, the selections, the gassings, the torture, brutality and inhumanity. He saw drawings, and construction sketches of the ramps, gas chambers and crematoria. Klein later wrote: “Even as I read the report for the first time, it was evident to me that it represented the horrors of reality, rather than the many unrealistic lies and self-deceiving excuses that we had previously been fed from so many different sources.”

And so, armed with information that few others had, the teenager made the fateful decision that saved his life. “I hesitated until the last moment,” Klein later wrote. It wasn’t until I saw the freight cars in front of me that I had the courage to run, despite the risk of being shot.”

Klein hid in a cellar until January 1945. No close acquaintances joined him. Given permission by his supervisor to tell immediate relatives and friends, Klein urged those closest to him to go underground, but, he wrote, “of the dozen or so people I warned, not one believed me.” Within two months, they, and most of the roughly half million Hungarian Jews who entered the cattle cars without resistance, were dead.

Vrba’s interview in Lanzmann’s film jolted Klein, reigniting powerful memories of decades past. Vrba described word-for-word the report that the 19-year-old Klein held in his hands all those years ago. As Klein wrote: “It was immediately clear to me that the report I had been given to read under a promise of secrecy in Budapest, in May 1944, was identical to the report” [Vrba was recalling].

Vrba also knew about the report that saved Klein’s life — because Vrba wrote it. He and his fellow Slovak friend, Alfred Wetzler, were among the few prisoners to escape from Auschwitz. Both men wrote books detailing their harrowing flight to freedom. That they survived to tell the tale is a miracle of unimaginable dimensions. They were almost captured many times. During the three days they were still in Auschwitz, hiding in a pit, they could hear above them the vicious guard dogs barking menacingly, and the SS camp guards growling murderously. On the 10-day dash to the Slovak border — without documents, a compass or maps — they were so close to several Nazi search patrols that the Germans only had to reach out and grab the two fugitives. For some unfathomable reason, Fortune reached out first, and shielded these two exceptionally heroic young men, rewarding their courage, ingenuity, daring and valor with decades of additional life.

Vrba said that he decided to escape for two reasons: First, like anyone else, he was motivated by self-preservation. He wanted to live. Second, he was desperate to warn Hungarian Jews that time was running out. He noticed the Nazis building a new crematorium and extending the railroad tracks directly to the gas chambers. He surmised that these preparations were for the Hungarian-Jewish community that had so far avoided extermination because Germany had not yet invaded Hungary. He overheard SS troops joking that they were awaiting “Hungarian salami.” At all costs, Vrba thought, Hungarian Jews must not get on those trains. Once the human cargo arrived at its destination, it would be too late.

He later explained that the Nazi death machine depended on deception. The Jews needed to believe that they would be treated well upon their arrival, otherwise, they would resist. The entire apparatus of death rested on the calm, orderly transfer of the Jews of Europe to the death camps. Vrba often said that even in Auschwitz, the German insistence on subterfuge continued up to the gas chambers themselves. Upon disembarking, the condemned still thought they were there to work. Only when they were jammed naked into the gas chambers — hundreds at a time — and the heavy doors clanked shut behind them did panic set in at the realization that these would be their last breaths.

The prisoners at Auschwitz were slaughtered like pigs, Vrba said. “Better,” he felt, “that the Jews of Europe be hunted down like deer, than slaughtered like pigs.” To force the Nazis to

hunt them down would disrupt the machinery of death, and increase their chance of survival. Lack of resistance only aided the Nazis, and facilitated the mass murder of Jews.

At the last possible moment, George Klein, having read the Vrba-Wetzler report, believing it to be true and knowing what awaited him at the end of the railway line, made the fateful decision to force the Nazis to hunt him down, rather than wait to be slaughtered.

The Holocaust is a mirage. The closer you get, the more it recedes. We will never fully understand. No sooner do you think that you finally comprehend, incomprehension overwhelms you. How to explain the nature of this barbarism? What are its causes? Why the Jews? Of all the savageries in the sordid history of human affairs – what explains the singling out of the Jews for unique odium? Why “Jews will not replace us?” Why not Scandinavians will not replace us or Unitarians will not replace us? Why not Hindus will not replace us? There are a billion Hindus in the world. Why not Buddhists will not replace us. There are 500 million Buddhists in the world. Why Jews? There are only 14 million of us. We are less than 2% of the American population, but were the target of 58% of all religiously-motivated hate crimes in 2020.

While it is, of course, true that antisemitism is on the spectrum of all expressions of hate, intolerance, xenophobia and racism, still, it strikes us as different, not only in degree, but also in kind. For sure, ideology plays a key role. No other supremacist ideology is as singularly fixated on an entire people. It is not only the hatred of a Jew. Many antisemites have never met a Jew in their lives. It is the obsession with Jewry, the Jewish people.

Historians now point to Hitler’s Reichstag speech in 1939 as the clearest indication of what he planned for European Jewry. To wild applause, Hitler snarled, “If international finance Jewry in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, the result will not be the Bolshevization of the Earth, and a victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”

From Mein Kampf in 1925 to his last day on earth, April 30, 1945, Hitler remained insanely obsessed not with individual Jews, but with the Jewish people. In his last will and testament, dictated from his stinking bunker in the putrid bowels of the earth, he wrote these words: “The responsibility for the outbreak of this war cannot rest on me. Centuries may pass, but out of the ruins of our cities and monuments of art there will arise a new hatred for the people who alone are ultimately responsible: International Jewry and its helpers.” The day before firing a bullet into his sick brain, this human monster responsible for the deaths of 80 million people – 6 million of them Jews – bid his final farewell to the German nation with these, his last ever recorded words: “Above all, I charge the leadership of the nation and their followers with merciless resistance against the universal poisoners of all peoples – international Jewry.”

While individual Jews suffer the consequences, the ideology of antisemitism focuses not on the Jewish person, but on the Jewish people. Antisemites are obsessed with what they call “international Jewry,” or the “worldwide Jewish conspiracy.” Nothing you do will change their

minds. Their antisemitism is not really about you. It is about them. It is a window on their own fears, hatreds, suspicions and insecurities.

Hence, the attack on Jewish diners at a Los Angeles sushi restaurant earlier this year by men draped in keffiyehs had nothing to do with the behavior of those diners. The attackers knew nothing about them. Some might have been complete atheists. Others might have been advocates of the Palestinian cause. There might even have been an anti-Zionist Jew among them. It didn't matter. What mattered was they were Jews. They were singled out from among all the other customers because they are of the Jewish people.

The London Jews who witnessed the caravan of Palestinian flag-wavers driving through their Jewish neighborhood shrieking "F--- the Jews. Rape their daughters!" did nothing to bring this about. They were targeted because they are of the Jewish people. The haters did not shout "F-- - the Zionists." They shouted "F--- the Jews." The Orthodox Jew beaten in Times Square by a pro-Palestinian mob was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Any person who looked Jewish would do.

I could list thousands of such incidences in the past year. They result from, and are a reflection of, an ideology focused obsessively on the Jewish people as the source of evil in the world. But ideology is not the only factor. Rudi Vrba was convinced that most German functionaries in the death camps were not driven by ideology. He knew them. He saw them up close. Two years in Auschwitz bestowed upon him an expertise in human nature that even a career in psychotherapy or philosophy will never grant. You can have five PhDs in psychiatry and have written a dozen books on mass murderers. It will never give you access to the depravity lurking in the hearts of men and women as two years in Auschwitz.

Vrba felt that human nature — our emotions, anxieties, insecurities, ego and self-interest — influence our actions more than ideology. He noted that no German was required to work at Auschwitz. Requests for transfers were almost always granted. Many of the death camp administrators knew how horrible it was. They were there and stayed there, Vrba said, because it was good for them. They had an abundance of cigarettes, bountiful food and meaningful friendships. They had opportunities at Auschwitz to further their careers.

Even the infamous Nazi doctor, Josef Mengele, who conducted brutal and inhuman experiments on living human beings, and with the flick of a wrist, sentenced multitudes to extermination — even he, according to Vrba, exploited Auschwitz to enhance his reputation and advance his career. He may have also been convinced of Nazi racial superiority, but he was a smalltime climber, Vrba thought, who didn't hesitate to murder. He ingratiated himself with prominent German scientists. "Since you are killing all those people anyway," said one prominent professor to an SS doctor, "you might just as well send me their brains."

Even the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoss, the most prolific mass murderer in the history of mankind, used Auschwitz to advance his career. In prison after the war, he wrote with pride about the technology of death that he administered. He considered it a great

achievement, an outstanding professional accomplishment. Hoss made no attempt to move his family away, even after he was reassigned to Berlin. His wife, Hedwig, testified that these years were the best and most comfortable years of their lives. The family would spend afternoons and pastoral weekends together on family outings. They had abundant food. The children later described the strawberries they grew in the garden, and they remembered their mother's insistence that they rinse the fruit thoroughly because they were covered in dust — the dust of human beings. They had free slaves, plucked directly from the endless supply a few hundred meters away. Why move to Berlin? They had a mansion. You can still see that house, right over the fence that separated all that is pleasant and pleasing about life from the nine circles of Hell.

It is true that there would have been no Holocaust if leading Nazis did not believe in Aryan racial supremacy, but ideology alone was not enough. Most people are not ideologues. We are followers, driven by our own needs and deep-seated insecurities. Everyone feels vulnerable. Everyone is susceptible to suspicion, manipulation, hate, fear, envy, anxiety, uncertainty, flattery, and conspiracy. If granted permission by authority figures to act upon these impulses — if the Pandora's Box of all manner of human evil cracks open even a little bit — our worst qualities will escape and find their way onto the political jet stream, polluting and contaminating the atmosphere of the globe.

This is why antisemitism is so dangerous. The Jewish people is and has always been the perfect scapegoat around which to organize and rally people to extreme political causes. It is nefarious Jewish power somehow centrally organized that stands in the way of peace, prosperity, liberation, or justice. Thus, communists could accuse the Jews of being capitalists. Capitalists could accuse the Jews of being communists. Nationalists could accuse the Jews of cosmopolitanism, and cosmopolitans could accuse the Jews of blind loyalty to the Jewish people. The hard left can accuse the Jews of being white and complicit in racial inequality, and the extreme right can accuse the Jews of being an insidious enemy of the white race.

Do you think that centuries-old hatred of the Jewish people has disappeared? Why? Because you live in the world now and do not know — or care to forget — the 2,000-year history of antisemitism? Toni Morrison wrote: "Before there is a final solution, there must be a first solution, a second one, even a third. The move toward a final solution is not a jump. It takes one step, then another, then another." Do you think that your ignorance of all the small solutions to the Jewish problem that eventually led to the Final Solution obviates in any way the desire of the antisemites of today to pick up where the anti-Semites of yesterday left off? If anything, ideologies of annihilating the Jews are gaining currency. The capabilities of antisemites have increased exponentially with the advent of social media. Out-of-control Jew-hatred metastasizes online. How terrifying to contemplate the extraordinary organizational capabilities this new medium affords. Imagine how much easier it would have been for Goebbels had he had social media at his disposal.

The explosion of antisemitism awakens in me a dire, depressing demoralizing dread. If there is one lesson to absorb from the Holocaust, it is when someone proclaims an intention to exterminate the Jews, believe them. Take them seriously. Iran threatens Jewish extermination

all the time. Hezbollah threatens Jewish extermination all the time. Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad threaten Jewish extermination all the time.

I have emphasized repeatedly that I am not opposed to legitimate criticism of Jews or the Jewish state – even when I believe such views are wrong, misinformed, biased or unfair. To the contrary, everyone needs critics to prevent us from doing stupid or immoral things. Not all criticism of Israel is illegitimate or unwarranted, and certainly not anti-Semitic. But some of it is – and in some places, such as college campuses, a lot of it is. It is undeniable that hatred of Israel foments hatred of Jews. Attacks on Israel lead to attacks on Jews.

If I were to have a philosophical conversation, I could accept the proposition that in some cases anti-Zionism does not constitute antisemitism. After all, there are plenty of anti-Zionist Jews. However, the extent and manner of the single-minded, blind obsession with Israel often bleeds into hatred of Jews, and normalizes Jew-hatred to an extent not seen since the darkest days of the 20th century. One step, then another, then another. Israel is a country whose evilness is self-evident in the minds and imaginations of the deluded. In many places, it is normative now to view Jews as white oppressors, even though the majority of the world's Jews are not even white. "Zionist" has become a curse word – another term for racist.

Wild accusations of ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, genocide — against the only actual democracy in the Middle East — are blood libels, different only in form, but not in substance, from Jews poisoning the wells, or murdering children to drain their blood to bake matzahs. Multitudes back then believed those libels too. They were already conditioned to suspect Jews, having been fed centuries of lies and conspiracies.

I want to explain to you why I spend so much time here emphasizing the antisemitism of the hard left. It is not because I believe that there is no antisemitism on the extreme right, or that it is any less pervasive or dangerous. There are more reported antisemitic incidences from the extreme right than the extreme left. But I am a liberal rabbi — and you are liberal Jews. And in my view, many liberal Jews are misled by the high-sounding rhetoric of anti-Zionist students, liberal professors, thought leaders, influencers, and media and social media personalities. For some, the term "social justice" now means that Israel is to blame for racism in American police departments. Even our own Jewish concept of "*tikkun olam*" — repairing the world — has been coopted and distorted by some sanctimonious Jews to virtue-signal their moral purity. Twenty percent of American Jews — one in five — believe that Israel is committing genocide on the Palestinians, according to a recent Pew study.

It is my job to counter these messages. If you do not hear it from me, you will not hear it at all. Even many rabbis nowadays fear telling the truth — the truth they know to be true, but are too intimidated to express. You may not agree. Some of you might be bubbling over with frustration now. But it is still important that you hear my views. Perhaps, at some later date, you might reconsider. And the rest of you might be fortified to hear that you are not alone: what you have been thinking is what I think.

The need for a fair, equitable and peaceful settlement to the Israel-Palestinian dispute is urgent. Both peoples have an indisputable claim to the land and to human dignity. But pro-Palestinian activity is often led by those who do not seek accommodation with Israel. They seek its annihilation. That is anti-Semitism. Israel — for the first time since antiquity — is home to a majority of Jews. More than half of all Jewish children in the world now live in Israel. Threats to destroy the Jewish state are threats to destroy the Jewish people.

When they shout, “Palestine, Free From the River to the Sea,” they mean “destroy Israel.” “Free Palestine” for them does not mean coexistence with Israel. It means Palestinian existence without Israel. Ask them. They don’t hide it. They simply rely on your ignorance and naïveté because they spout words that sound progressive to you: human rights, civil rights, indigenous rights, anti-racism, anti-apartheid, anti-colonialism. For them, it is nefarious Jewish power centrally organized by Israel and supported by world Jewry, standing in the way of peace, prosperity, liberation and justice. That is what justifies assaulting Jews in a sushi restaurant. By virtue of their Jewishness, they are complicit in the worldwide Jewish conspiracy to suppress human rights, organized, financed and led by the Jewish state.

If these agitators were truly about human rights, they would be concerned with the real threats to human rights: the thousands of missiles indiscriminately fired upon Israeli civilians from Hamas, a terrorist, fundamentalist, misogynistic, gay-hating regime implacably committed to Israel’s annihilation. What in the world are progressives doing supporting such people? If they were truly about human rights, they would be concerned about the 500,000 Palestinians still confined to Lebanese refugee camps 73 years after Israel’s founding. They would speak against the rampant antisemitism and blood-curdling threats to annihilate the Jews. They would advocate on behalf of the hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims deprived by their own regimes of human rights and human dignity.

You speak about ethnic cleansing and not a word, not a peep, about Muslim Uighurs in concentration and reeducation camps. You speak about massacres, and not a word about the thousands of Palestinians and other Syrians gassed to death and the hundreds of thousands butchered by a brutal dictator.

How dare you equate Israel with Nazis? Have you seen what the Nazis did? Read the Vrba-Wetzler report. Visit Auschwitz yourself. See the mountains of human hair the Nazis used to stuff pillows and furniture. Look at the piles of shoes, the dolls seized from children, the eyeglasses. See the luggage with the names and addresses of the condemned from every European city of high culture and advanced philosophy — belonging to people, who, as Rudi Vrba described, were convinced that they would need this luggage upon relocation and who couldn’t fathom that the most cultivated society in the history of the world would kill them upon arrival? That was the Nazis.

We should reflect deeply on our withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is not that Americans are bad people. Despite the chaotic withdrawal, we did many good things there. Of course, the United States has its share of racists and xenophobes, but, more than any other country, America has

opened the doors to the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. But the lesson of Afghanistan for the Jews — a lesson we should have learned a thousand times — is that if you want to survive, especially in the Middle East, the world's worst neighborhood, you need to rely on yourself. You cannot subcontract your defense and protection to anyone, least of all to faux human rights activists and their deluded American Jewish supporters who sit in Ivory Towers: intellectuals who write and think all day, who preen with academic arrogance — but are incapable of understanding what is really going on in people's hearts. Preoccupied with their shallow self-righteousness, they ignore even basic human emotions, motivations and drives. Bleeding hearts who have no heart for Jews who bleed. It is all academic for them. We should have the courage, the decency, the honesty to say that our side, the liberal side, is wrong. We, too, are writing and supporting untruths — vicious, malicious, voracious, fallacious, rapacious, audacious lies.

All of us, especially young adults, teenagers and university students — you need to feel antisemitism in your *kishkes*. Learn to appreciate subtlety, nuance and context. Develop the capacity to distinguish between legitimate critique and the new mutated form of antisemitism dressed up in the garments of pathological anti-Zionism. If you oppose Israeli policies, say so. Be active. Try to influence and make a difference. But whatever you do, you cannot give comfort, cooperation, and credibility to those who hate your people. Often, what they oppose is not the excesses of the Israeli military, but that a Jewish army exists at all. Jewish tank commanders, Jewish fighter pilots are disorienting to a world that had grown accustomed over the centuries to passive, disempowered Jewish victims — the kind that Rudi Vrba described.

Rudi Vrba and George Klein spoke for 10 straight hours that spring day in the faculty lounge of the University of British Columbia. They parted as old friends. Destiny bound them together forever. Klein learned that Vrba considered his report a failure. He escaped in order to warn the Jews of Hungary what awaited them at the end of the line. Yet the Hungarian Jewish community was largely destroyed. Hundreds of thousands were gassed within hours of their arrival in Birkenau.

On May 27, 1944, two additional Jews escaped from Auschwitz: Czeslaw Mordowicz and Arnost Rosin. They arrived in Slovakia six weeks after Vrba and Wetzler. By then, the destruction of Hungarian Jewry was in full force, precisely what Vrba and Wetzler had surmised and were desperate to prevent. "Wetzler and I saw preparations for the slaughter," Vrba later said, "Mordowicz and Rosin saw the slaughter itself."

President Roosevelt read the Vrba-Wetzler report sometime in the summer or fall of 1944. Although nothing like the eyewitness account and detailed sketches of the machinery of extermination were previously documented, the broad intentions of the Nazis to annihilate European Jewry were known as early as 1942. The Americans knew. The British knew. The Swiss knew. The Vatican knew. Even The New York Times knew. The victims, themselves, did not know, until the doors were slammed shut and Zyklon pellets were released into what they thought were shower rooms. The Allies never bombed the tracks or the gas chambers, as Vrba



urged. Roosevelt insisted that the best way to save the Jews of Europe was for the Allies to win the war as quickly as possible.

For his entire life, Vrba regretted that his report failed to save the Jews of Hungary. George Klein reminded Vrba that he saved at least one Hungarian Jew. To save even one life is to save the entire world, according to our Sages. Furthermore, said Klein, you played a role in saving at least 100,000, perhaps 200,000, Hungarian Jews. In the aftermath of the report, international pressure was placed upon Hungarian Regent, Miklos Horthy, and he intervened to stop the deportations in July – only one week before the scheduled final transport of the Jews of Budapest. Klein suggested to his new friend that even if Hungarian Jews had read the report in full, most of them would have still gotten on those trains. “Denial is natural,” said Klein. He told Vrba that he had shared the report with twelve other people and none believed him.

George Klein lived to the ripe age of 91. His split-second decision to run from the freight train enriched the world. He was a pioneer in microbiology, and was credited, along with his wife, Eva, for laying the foundation of modern tumor immunology. He and Eva had three children. They were married for close to 70 years. Eva, 96 years young, is still alive.

Rudy Vrba died in 2006, at the age of 81. He rests in a little-visited cemetery on the outskirts of Vancouver. A simple footstone marks his grave: “Rudolph Vrba — September 11, 1924 — March 27, 2006.” There is nothing to mark the heroism, the sheer force of will, the daring and courage of this extraordinary man. Perhaps it is fitting. The best of us are driven by life forces so deep, and so unfathomable that words never do justice.

One of the lucky breaks that contributed to Vrba’s survival in Auschwitz was his assignment to what the prisoners called “Kanada,” the warehouse designated for processing the stolen goods of the transported Jews. Whatever valuables could fit into luggage was there: food, clothing, money, jewelry hidden in coat linings and even in tubes of toothpaste. Those who had the great fortune to work in Kanada could sneak away enough food to increase dramatically their chances of survival. The prisoners called the warehouses “Kanada” because they heard that Canada was fabulously wealthy — and Kanada was filled with figs, dates, lemons, oranges, chocolate, cheeses, butter, cakes and other luxuries like soap, cosmetics, and silk shirts from the finest stores in Paris.

Perhaps it was fate that Rudi Vrba ended up in the real Canada. Or maybe in some mysterious psychological way he was drawn to Canada after Kanada saved him. He picked himself from the valley of death, and got on with life. He had two daughters, one of whom, sadly, predeceased him. He had two grandchildren. He was successful, accomplished and respected. It is the best response to those who hate Jews. Keep moving forward. Find meaning and purpose. Help others. Show compassion. Fight for justice. Defend your people. Resist evil. Warn the world. It was important to know, said Rudi’s wife, Robin, that even though he went through all that misery, he still had a very nice life. “He had a lot of humor and a lot of joy. He enjoyed every moment of his life.” It pleases me that this was so. If anyone deserved peace and tranquility, if anyone deserved a full life, it was Rudi Vrba.

Those two years in Auschwitz remained inside of him for all the rest of his days. He lived in two countries, Canada and Kanada. He never forgot and never forgave. The original title of his book was "I Cannot Forgive." Still, he overcame. Nothing that life would serve up could be worse than what he already endured. It granted him perspective — the kind that only the deepest suffering gives. He learned to appreciate every gift of life and never to take anything for granted.

Many of my visits to Eastern Europe and the concentration camps have been in winter. I always think how unbearable it must have been for prisoners to endure the elements — undernourished and inadequately protected from the brutal cold, the steel winds and the sweeping rains. Rudi Vrba must have spent many days shivering outside in the cold rain of Southern Poland.

I was moved, therefore, to have heard Robin say that even the incessant rain of Vancouver never depressed her husband. While others would complain, Rudi Vrba's response to a storm was always: "Isn't it nice to be inside."