

**SONIA SCHREIBER WEITZ, "I PROMISED I WOULD TELL" (TRANSL. FROM ENGLISH INTO ARMENIAN BY AELITA DOLUKHANYAN), YEREVAN, 2017: ZANGAK PUBLISHING HOUSE, 156 P. (IN ARM.)**

**SONIA WEITZ'S LESSONS ARE FOR ETERNITY**

Sonia Schreiber Weitz's book detailing her story of Holocaust survival shocked me and stayed with me. Hence, I decided to bring this book to the Armenian audience.

In Boston, USA, I was fortunate to meet Sonia Weitz's daughter, Sandra J. Schreiber Weitz, a generous, charming, and life-affirming woman who has dedicated much of her professional life to helping youth and promoting social justice. When we met, Sandy, as Sandra goes by, was preparing to move to Israel where her twin sister had been living for a long time with her family. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Sandy Weitz, the Executor of Sonia Schreiber Weitz's estate (1928-2010), for giving me permission to translate this book from English into Armenian.

As a student, I remember reading Anne Frank's "The Diary of a Young Girl," and recall loaning my copy of that book to friends and family, practically forcing them to read it. In 1962, as a young student, I visited the Auschwitz concentration camp, which is a living condemnation of Nazism. At Auschwitz I had a hard time not passing out, and was haunted by the images of the hills of children's shoes, eyeglasses, and human hair, all belonging to the victims of the camps, most of them Jews. At Auschwitz we saw how the Nazis carried out medical experiments on humans without any anesthesia. Then we saw the unspeakable horror of handbags and lampshades made of human skin. The crematory with gas chambers left us all wondering how this devastation can be brought on by one human on the other.

And Sonia Weitz lived through the horrors of the Krakow Jewish Ghetto, Auschwitz, and four other concentration camps. Of Sonia's 84-person family, only Sonia and her sister Blanca survived the Holocaust.

Sonia Weitz's book "I Promised I Would Tell" is a documentary of her experiences. Sonia tells it like it was, without exaggeration and hyperbole, and it is the power of this documentary approach that communicates the enormity of the inhumanity, calamity and devastation brought on by the Holocaust. At the same time, Sonia Weitz's book communicates hope by showing the power of the human spirit to survive, to see the beauty of life. Sonia Weitz also condemns bigotry and racism. Reading this book will help humanity become better by learning from the mistakes of the past, and live up to the divine mandates of doing good and rejecting evil.

In the preface to her book, Sonia Weitz refers to the "Armenian Genocide" as historically forgotten. As Hitler famously said in 1939, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" And we all know that what followed the "historically forgotten" Armenian Genocide, as Sonia Weitz characterized it, is the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust.

In his novel "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh," great humanitarian and author Franz Werfel documented the plight of Armenians at the hands of Turks who savagely slaughtered them with the intent of emptying Armenia's historical homeland of its native population and expropriating their wealth. As a result of such brutality, more than one and a half million Armenians perished in the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire. Lack of condemnation by world powers led to A.Hitler following the Ottoman script of annihilation, and more than six million Jews perished in the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany. Sonia Weitz's hope is that we will learn from the memory of these atrocities, and the memory will "shield us from repeating such unthinkable evil."

"I Promised I Would Tell" is full of poetry because Sonia was a poet. Her poetry is striking and full of lyricism, light, life affirmation. Through her poems, Sonia touches on issues of human grief, loss, desperation. At the same time, her poetry is hopeful.

In this book, Sonia brings to life the stories of other Jewish victims and survivors. We come to know her Father, Mother, Blanca, Norbert, Giza, and others.

How beautiful and inspiring is the image of Blanca, Sonia's sister, who takes Sonia under her wing. Blanca was eight years older than Sonia, and loved the latter more than her own life. The power of their sisterly love helped them survive the valley of death and find themselves in the world of the living.

Neither the Holocaust, nor the Armenian Genocide should ever be forgotten. It is books like this that help accomplish that mission, and Sonia Weitz's book is a major contribution to the body of literature on the subject.

A significant amount of scholarship has been conducted on the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. One of the recent books that particularly stands out is scholar, diplomat, and human rights advocate Samantha Powers's Pulitzer prize-winning "A Problem from Hell" where she documents both the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust in great detail. It is the testimony of survivors like Sonia Schreiber Weitz that has helped advance scholarship on the subject, and give voice to the victims and survivors.

Sonia Weitz's book is also an eloquent and resounding requiem for the millions of Jews that became victims of the Holocaust. This requiem honors their memory, and communicates faith and hope that the day will come when humanity regains its consciousness and realizes that atrocities like this are unacceptable, and must be universally condemned. And we should never allow annihilation of people in the name of a super-race, blind authority, quest for power, and obsession for control.

Sonia Weitz teaches us all not to be indifferent bystanders. She starts out by asking where was God, but ends asking where was man. In Sonia's eloquent words:

"But now I feel God wasn't dead  
And *where was man* I ask instead?"

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