Kuphal (left), Weissmark: planning a conference, they learned to trust one another.

Talking Points: Children of Nazis Meet Children of the Holocaust

BY KATE WALBERT

Although Mona Weissmark and Ilona Kuphal think of themselves as sisters, some might swear that they were born to be enemies. Weissmark, 37, is the daughter of Jewish concentration camp survivors. Her colleague, Kuphal, is the daughter of a Waffen S.S. officer. Now, they are using their friendship to help children of survivors and children of Nazis meet and find common ground.

Mirror opposites—one blond, one brunette—they have come to speak in a kind of syncopated rhythm; often sentences begun by one woman are completed by the other. "Our relationship *must* be symbolic of what we're trying to achieve. It represents so much, and it's so overloaded with baggage," says Weissmark.

They met more than a year ago, when Weissmark, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, contacted Kuphal, an actress and drama teacher in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who had been pursuing research on the Holocaust for an experimental theater piece.

At the beginning, their relationship was tense. As a child of survivors, Weissmark says, it is difficult to trust *anyone,* much less the child of an S.S. officer. "When the child of a survivor meets the child of a Nazi, there are six million dead people between them," Weissmark says. "I thought, to what degree could she [Kuphal] really understand? To what degree could she empathize?"

Yet when Kuphal recounted the meaning of the Holocaust in her life, Weissmark heard a familiar story. "It was like seeing the flip side of myself," she says. "Ilona was describing pictures from the Holocaust, seeing the children going to gas chambers. I had inherited those same memories."

They agreed to work together on a joint conference, exhilarated and frightened by the possibilities. The two women wrote to about 70 potential participants. They received responses from about 30 individuals: children of high-ranking Nazis and those whose parents had participated in the Hitler youth as well as children whose parents survived the concentration camps, including one whose father was a Kapo—a Jew who worked for the Nazis in the camps.

They interviewed each applicant, choosing individuals from different economic, social, and professional backgrounds. This daily preparation, which took 17 months, strengthened their own relationship and established mutual trust.

Finally, in September 1992, 22 individuals (some from as far away as Australia and Israel) met at Harvard University's Medical Education Center. For four emotional days, the group met in discussion sessions, facilitated by Dr. Daniel Giacomo, a psychiatrist who is neither Jewish nor German.

For many of the survivors' children, the initial foray into the conference room felt like a shameful act. "On the first day," says Weissmark, "a child of a survivor asked, 'Am I betraying my parents by being here?' "

"There is the fear that if Jews get close to Germans," says Kuphal, "they will be forgetting the past. This is not the purpose of our work at all. The purpose is remembering together, and in this way creating something new, a more powerful memory."

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Betsy Kalau, the daughter of a Nazi army officer, felt she needed to make sense of the tragedy. "If we remained enemies then we would continue Hitler's work," said Kalau, who traveled from Farmington, Maine. Fearful at first that she would be the subject of "understandable accusations, anger, and rage," she chose to participate at any cost. "The fear did not stop me."

As the meeting progressed, participants spoke about how their parents' lives had affected them. They were trying, Kuphal says, "not to stand in different corners as enemies."

"But when the tension got high, you would feel that the child was no longer there, but the parent," says Weissmark.

Janet Applefield of Plymouth, Massachusetts, said she

PHOTOGRAPH BY KEN WINOKUR

began to connect with the children of Nazis when they spoke about their isolation.

"They talked at great length about loneliness, about how they were cut off from their parents' experiences. I grew up lonely, too," said Applefield, whose childhood was spent in hiding in Poland. "I lost my mother and dozens of family members. I lost my childhood."

At the end of the meeting, the group agreed to reconvene in Germany this summer, and Kuphal and Weissmark formed Face-to-Face, a nonprofit organization promoting future conferences, educational outreach, and research. Now the two are planning their most difficult conference to date—a face-to-face in a Bavarian town near Dachau.

"There's no time to be lost," says Kuphal. "There are a lot of people like me still in Germany. They've been in the closet, they haven't had people to talk to."

Growing up in Herford, West Germany, near Hannover, Kuphal asked her parents about the Holocaust. She was met with silence and rage. Her father would simply get up and leave the room, she says. "I lost a father because I could not talk to him."

At 15, while watching the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, Kuphal first heard about the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis. Seven years later she left West Germany for the United States.

For Weissmark, the Eichmann trial also brought the Holocaust to light. Her parents, who had moved to Queens, New York, hid the truth from their seven-year-old daughter, explaining that the concentration camp numbers tattooed on their wrists were old telephone numbers.

"Eichmann was the first Nazi I had ever seen," Weissmark remembers. "It was very strange. My mother worked, yet this one afternoon she was watching TV and crying." Suddenly she began to understand why she, unlike her friends, had no grandparents, aunts, or uncles.

The Holocaust isolated Weissmark from her peers. "You can't talk about it, because it's so morbid no one wants to hear about it, and no one can understand it, so you feel different, separate."

Not long ago, Weissmark introduced her mother to Kuphal. Anxious at first—she didn't tell her mother who they were meeting until they were driving to the engagement—she watched amazed as her mother, who never spoke of Auschwitz to strangers, opened up to Kuphal. "It was so important. My mother saw that the children of Nazis are not Nazis," says Weissmark. "Later she said that she was glad we were friends." Ms.

Kate Walbert is a free-lance writer living in New Haven, Connecticut.

Untraditional Ad, Old-Time Values

The Normans may be a traditional family, but let's face it: they're on a very untraditional billboard (below).

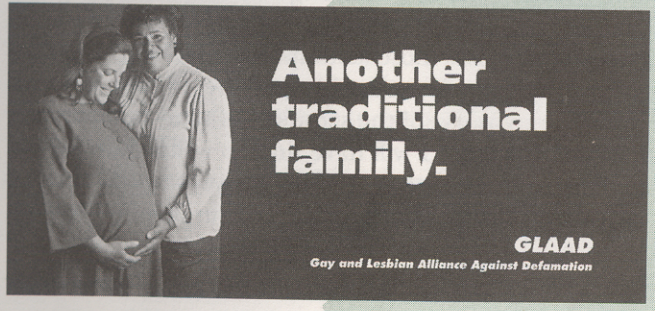
In fact, Pat and Karen Norman have made the news because they're part of a brand-new, ground-breaking advertising campaign by the San Francisco bureau of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).

The billboards, which can be admired from highways along the California coast, were the brainchild of Trish McDermott, part of GLAAD's San Francisco Bay Area Lesbian Visibility Task Force.

"Lesbians are ignored by the media," says McDermott. "If the story is positive, it tends to be about gay men. If it is negative, the story jumps on them too. It's like we don't exist."

So McDermott cast her eye for real-life models and asked the Normans, an expecting California couple, to pose. "We said sure. It's an honor," says Pat. The only problem: Karen was due any day. So the shoot was set up in a hurry, and Karen gave birth to Zachary only five days later.

How does it feel to be larger than life? "When we saw ourselves up there, we thought, maybe we should've talked this over," Karen says. "But almost everyone has been positive. And we think the picture is just gorgeous."



■ Something new for the trash bin: Bench Warmer, a line of trading cards, features bikinied women posing with sports equipment (we'll spare you the details). The cards, created by Bench Warmer, Inc., in Edison, New Jersey, are sold at comic-book stores, but we think they're headed for the Hall of Shame.

■ Egged on by some faculty at West Virginia's Marshall University, student reporters of *Parthenon,* the campus paper, published the name and address of a 28-year-old rape survivor. The journalism school director, Harold Shaver, claimed the paper simply mimicked the Des Moines *Register,* which won a Pulitzer for its story about rape survivor Nancy Zigenmeyer. Professor Shaver, go to the back of the class. The *Register* printed Zigenmeyer's name *only at her request;* the *Parthenon* never interviewed the victim. At press time, the alleged assailant, Charles Franklin Plymail, a junior at Marshall, is in jail, charged with assaulting another woman. The rape survivor has been harassed by obscene phone calls and peeping Toms.

—Ann López

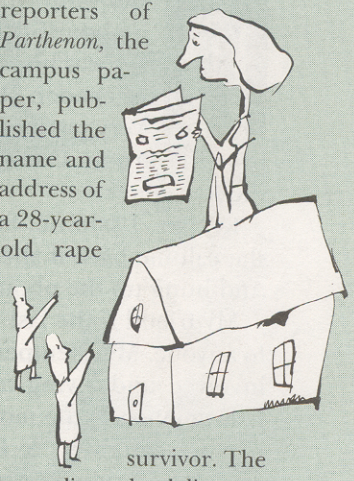


ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPHER MULLEN