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y used a map to recall where relatives were during World War
ople Helping People, Face to Face" were children of Nazis.

By KIM S. HIRSH

FOR many years Alan Berkowitz did not know about his father's life in the forest. Mr. Berkowitz, 33, a West Hartford resident, said that when he was growing up, he tried to find out how his father, who died when Mr. Berkowitz was 10, had survived the Holocaust. But whenever he questioned his grandmother, the soft-spoken woman would say in a firm voice, "The war is over."

Mr. Berkowitz began to piece together his father's past on a trip to Israel during college when he met a cousin who explained how Mr. Berkowitz's father, at the age of 12, had escaped with his parents into the woods in December of 1942, two days before the Nazis murdered the Jewish people in their town or transported them to concentration camps. The family lived in the forest with partisans until the area was liberated about two year later.

After hearing that account, Mr. Berkowitz wanted to know more.

Recently he and his wife, Lois, a psychologist whose father survived the Auschwitz concentration camp, drew closer to their parents' histories in the most obvious but most unsettling place, and with some unlikely companions: The Berkowitzes traveled to Germany, where, for four days, they talked, cried and agonized with the children of Nazis.

Trying to End the Cycle

They took part in a program begun about two years ago by Mona Weissmark, 39, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut who is the daughter of concentration camp survivors, and Ilona Khupal, 46, a Cambridge, Mass., resident and a native of Germany whose father was an officer in the S.S. The program, called "People Helping People, Face to Face," brings together the children of survivors of concentration camps and the children of Nazis to share what the organizers say is their common bond in history and to try to end the cycle of hatred that can pass from one generation to the next.

"This is not to forget the past. It's to transform our relationship," Dr. Weissmark said. "It puts a different ending on it. Hilter would never have imagined that we would be working toward creating another kind of relationship."

After an initial conference in Boston last September that brought together 11 children of camp survivors and 11 children of Nazis, Dr. Weissmark and Ms. Khupal arranged the meeting earlier this year in Germany.

Fourteen people — Americans from the Northeast including the Berkowitzes, who are children of survivors, and children of Nazis who live in the United States and Germany — attended the session, as well as one former Nazi who is now speaking out against the rebirth of neo-Nazism in Germany. The sessions were moderated by a psychiatrist from Harvard Medical School, Dr. Daniel Giacomo, who is neither German nor Jewish.

Mr. Berkowitz said the meeting was a way to continue to fill in the "blacked out part" of his father's life. "I wanted to see the second generation — my contemporaries — where they were at. Did they deny the Holocaust ever happened?" Mr. Berkowitz, who sells pet supplies, said in a recent interview in the

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couple's contemporary-style home. What he found, he said, were people like himself. "They felt a tremendous amount of guilt," he said, "and they identified with Jews and wanted to do more for Jews." He said one of his main concerns has been that many Germans have refused to talk about the Holocaust, in which six million Jews were killed. But he said he was impressed with the children of Nazis he met in Germany.

"The most important thing was that they were ready to speak, ready to recognize history for what it is and deal with it, as opposed to sweeping it under the rug," Mr. Berkowitz said.

Finding Similarities

Dr. Weissmark and Ms. Khupal have found many similarities between the children of survivors and the children of Nazis — and between themselves. They met in early 1991 when Dr. Weissmark was beginning research on the connections between the two groups. She called Ms. Khupal, who had been active in German-Jewish dialogue groups, and the two women discovered their common experiences in trying to cope with their parents' pasts.

"I would be talking and she would say, 'Oh, my God, that's the way I felt,' " said Ms. Khupal, who is an actress and a real estate agent. "There's a feeling of aloneness, of having this burden on your shoulders."

Ms. Khupal and Dr. Weissmark both found out about the Holocaust by seeing the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Dr. Weissmark, who, as a 7-year-old, watched her mother break down in tears in front of the television, said the trial was her first explanation of why she had no relatives; they had all been killed. For Ms. Khupal, who was 15 at the time, the Eichmann trial was the beginning of a frustrating quest to find out more about her family's and country's past.

'Let the Past Rest'

"Nobody wanted to talk to me about it. Everybody would always say, 'We didn't know anything,' or 'Let the past rest,' " Ms. Khupal said, adding that her history books in school only covered up to the 19th-century Prussian chancellor Bismarck. "When I was smaller, I would hear, 'Oh, this store belonged to a Jew,' and I didn't even know what a Jew was."

In a research paper stemming from the first meeting in Boston, Dr. Weissmark and Dr. Giacomo and Ms. Khupal wrote that some of the common experiences they discovered among children of Nazis and children of survivors were a compulsion to seek information about the war years, since they often received piecemeal facts or no information at all from their parents; a strong personal sense of justice that lead many of them into social service work, and a sense of connectedness with one another through their common history.

"It's almost like an umbilical cord. We're really not at liberty to break it," said Dr. Weissmark.

The Second Generation

Many in this second generation also experience feelings such as guilt, anger and sadness — the children of Nazis because of what their parents did, and the children of survivors, in September in the "Journal of Narrative and Life History."

Just attending the "Face to Face" meetings is extremely difficult for the participants. Representatives of both sides often feel they're betraying their parents by meeting with the children of their parents' enemies or — in the case of the children of Nazis — by "dragging their fathers' names in the mud," said Dr. Weissmark.

"I really cannot fathom why people would choose to meet with the descendants of their families' murderers," said Susan Birke, a lawyer from the New Haven area whose mother was a Holocaust survivor. "The only thing they could do for me is to bring back my great-grandparents, my aunts, uncles and cousins who were all murdered. Other than that, I have no interest in helping them to work through their guilt."

'Therapeutic Effects'

But Ms. Khupal and Dr. Weissmark said that both the children of Nazis

The aim is to change relationships, not to forget the past.

and children of survivors who choose to take part in such sessions can gain from them. "It's not therapy, but it can have therapeutic effects," said Dr. Weissmark.

Dr. Weissmark said that after the sessions in Germany ended, "There was a tremendous sense of relief." She said Dr. Giacomo asked the participants what they were leaving behind, and what they were taking with them.

"There's a sense that people are leaving behind — metaphorically speaking — a lot of anger, a lot of resentment, a lot of fears — the burden of having carried this legacy around," Dr. Weissmark said. "What they're leaving with is a sense of renewed hope, a sense that 'I really belong,' that 'I'm not alone in this.' "

Ms. Khupal and Dr. Weissmark are planning similar meetings in Boston and Germany.

One of the hardest things for Mr. Berkowitz was simply going to Germany. Beforehand, if travel plans called for a stopover in Germany, he just wouldn't go, he said. When he first arrived in the town in Germany for the meeting, he said he checked his hotel for an escape route, and he wouldn't sit down on trains so that he could get out easily. He didn't sleep much at night.

But he did feel better toward the end of the trip, Mr. Berkowitz said, especially after the group visited a high school, where the students kept the "Face to Face" group there for hours, peppering them with questions.

"They wanted to know: How could you be afraid to come to Germany? How could this happen? Why don't we know more about this period?" Mr. Berkowitz said. The students' concerns, he said, "made me feel really good that this is not a closed issue." ■