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BAD AROLSEN, Germany (AP) - Deep in Shari Klages' memory is an image of herself as a girl in New Jersey, going into her parents' bedroom, pulling a thick leather-bound album from the top shelf of a closet and sitting down on the bed to leaf through it.

What she saw was page after page of ink-and-watercolor drawings that convey, with simple lines yet telling detail, the brutality of Dachau, the Nazi concentration camp where her father spent the last weeks of World War II.

Arrival, enslavement, torture, death - the 30 pictures expose the worsening nightmare through the artist's eye for the essential, and add graphic texture to the body of testimony by Holocaust survivors.

"I have a sense of being quite horrified, of feeling my stomach in my throat," Klages says. Just by looking at the book, she felt she was doing something wrong and was afraid of being caught.

Now, she finally wants to make the album public.
Scholars who have seen it call it historically unique and an artistic treasure.

But who drew the pictures? Only Klages' father could know. It was he who brought the album back from Dachau when he immigrated to America on a ship with more than 60 Holocaust orphans - and he had committed suicide in 1972 in his garage in Parsippany, N.J.

The sole clue was a signature at the bottom of several drawings: Porulski.

Klages, 47, has begun a quest to discover who Porulski was, and how her family came to be the custodian of his remarkable artistic legacy. The Associated Press has helped to fill in some of the blanks.

What unfolds is a story of Holocaust survival compressed into two tragic lives, a tale with threads stretching from Warsaw to Auschwitz and Dachau, from Australia to suburban England, and finally to a bedroom in New Jersey where a fatherless girl makes a traumatic discovery.

It shows how today, as the survivors dwindle in number, their children and grandchildren struggle to comprehend the Nazi genocide that indelibly scarred their families, and in the process run into mysteries that may never be solved.

This is Shari Klages' mystery: How did Arnold Unger, her Polish Jewish father, a 15-year-old newcomer to Dachau, end up in possession of the artwork of a Polish Catholic more than twice his age, who had been in the concentration camps through most of World War II?

None of the records Klages found confirm that the two men knew each other, though they lived in adjacent blocks in Dachau. All that is certain is that Unger overlapped with Porulski during the three weeks the boy spent among nearly 30,000 inmates of Dachau's main camp.

"He never talked about his experiences in the war, "said Klages."I don't recall specifically ever being told about the album, or actually learning that I was the child of a Holocaust survivor. It was just something I always knew."

As adults, she and her three siblings took turns keeping the album and Unger's other wartime memorabilia.

The album begins with an image of four prisoners in winter coats carrying suitcases and marching toward Dachau's watchtower under the rifles of SS guards. It is followed by a scene of two inmates being stripped for a humiliating examination by a kapo, a prisoner working for the Nazis.

One image portrays two prisoners pausing in their work to doff their caps to a soldier escorting a prostitute _ intimidated by the seam on her stocking. Another shows a leashed dog lunging at a terrified inmate.

The drawings grow more and more debasing. Three prisoners hang by their arms tied behind their backs; a captured escapee is paraded wearing a sign, "Hurray, I am back again"; an inmate is hanged from a scaffold; and, in the final image, a man lies on the ground, shot dead next to the barbed-wire fence under the looming watchtower.

The album also has 258 photographs. Some are copies of well-known, haunting images of piles of victims' bodies taken by the U.S. army that liberated the camp. Others are photographs, apparently taken for Nazi propaganda, portraying Dachau as an idyllic summer camp. Still others are personal snapshots of Unger with Polish refugees or with American soldiers who befriended him.

Barbara Distel, the director of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, said Porulski probably drew the pictures shortly after the camp's liberation in April 1945. He used identical sheets of paper, ink and watercolors for all 30 pictures, she said, and he "would never have dared" to draw such horrors while he was still under Nazi gaze.

"It's amazing after so many years that these kinds of documents still turn up," Distel told the AP. "It's a unique artifact," and clearly drawn by someone with an intimate knowledge of the camp's reality, she said.

Holocaust artwork has turned up before, but Distel and Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum, who is with the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, say they are unaware of any sequential narrative of camp life comparable to Porulski's.

"I've seen two or three or four, but never 30," said Berenbaum.

In Coral Springs, Fla., where she now lives, Klages showed the book in 2005 to a neighbor, Avi Hoffman, executive director of the National Center for Jewish Cultural Arts. Hoffman immediately saw its quality and significance. The two became determined to uncover its background and find out if the artist had created an undiscovered body of work.

In August, Klages, Hoffman and Berenbaum went to Germany to begin their hunt. They hired a crew to document it, hoping a film would help finance a foundation to exhibit the book.

They began chipping away at the album's secrets at the Dachau memorial, outside Munich, where they found an arrival record for Michal Porulski, which listed his profession as artist, in 1941.

They learned that Unger hid the fact that he was Jewish when he reached Dachau three weeks before the war ended. "That probably saved his life," Hoffman said. They also discovered a strong likelihood that the album's binding was fashioned from the recycled leather of an SS officer's uniform.

Unger, an engaging youngster, became an office boy and translator for U.S. occupation authorities at Dachau, which was turned into a displaced persons camp, and obtained a U.S. visa in 1947.

Research by Klages' group and the AP has begun to pull together the scattered threads of Porulski's life from long forgotten records at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, a tiny museum in Warsaw, Auschwitz and Dachau, the International Tracing Service of the Red Cross, Australian immigration records and data from England.

Porulski enrolled in the Warsaw arts academy in 1934 after completing two years of army service. Attached to his neatly written application is a photograph of a good looking young man with light hair and dreamy eyes.

It says he was a farmer's son, born June 20, 1910, in the central town of Rychwal, although in later records Porulski said he was born five years later.

Chronically poor, he left the academy after failing to secure a loan for his tuition but was later reinstated. After Germany invaded in 1939, he made some money painting watercolor postcards of Nazi-occupied Poland, two of which have survived and are now in the Warsaw Museum of Caricature.

In June 1940, he was arrested in a Nazi roundup "without any reason," he wrote many years later in an appeal for help from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Two months later, he and 1,500 others were the first Poles to be shipped from Warsaw to Auschwitz. He spent eight months there, then was sent to the Neuengamme camp and finally to Dachau, near Munich, in July 1941.

In Dachau, according to a brief reference in a Polish book on wartime art, he painted portraits, flowers, folk dance scenes and decoration for a clandestine theater.

In 1949 he sailed to Australia and tried to work as a painter and decorator but mostly lived off friends.

Relatives say he was robbed of his money and passport. He returned to Europe in 1963 and lived in England. He visited Poland in the early 1970s for about three weeks, and stayed with his sister, Janina Krol, in Gdynia on the Baltic coast, and another relative, outside Warsaw, Wanda Wojcikowska.

He brought his sister paintings of Dachau, his niece, Danuta Ostrowska, now 75, recalls. But her mother threw them away, saying "I can't look at them." The family still owns nine of his prewar paintings.

Poland's communist authorities wanted Porulski out of the country, Wojcikowska's daughter, Malgorzata Stozek, recalls. "My mother even found a woman willing to marry him, to help him stay in Poland," but he had already left, Stozek says.

His letters from England said he found work maintaining bridges, Stozek said. "He wrote that the moment he finished painting a bridge over some river, he had to start again." It could have been a metaphor for a life going nowhere.

"One day I came to see my mother and she was crying because he wrote to her that he had no money, he was hungry and was sleeping on park benches. He lived in terrible poverty," Stozek told the AP.

He was so lonely, she said, he had considered suicide.

In 1978 he sent a request for war compensation to the International Tracing Service in the central German town of Bad Arolsen, which houses the world's largest archive of concentration camp records and lists of Holocaust victims.

"I have no occupation of any sort. I was unable to resume my studies after all those years in the camps," he wrote. "I am just by myself, and I live from day to day."

The ITS replied that it had no authority to give grants, but was sending confirmation of his incarceration to the U.N. refugee agency to support his earlier reparations claim.

Unger also shows up in the Tracing Service, in a 1955 two-page letter he wrote recounting his ordeal that began when he was 9.

Unger's father had a prosperous furniture business near Krakow. "Then the infamous horde of Nazis overran our town, disrupted our life, murdered my parents and little sister, and robbed us of all we had." He was the only survivor of 50 members of the Unger family.

Christian friends hid him for a while, but he ended up imprisoned inside the Krakow ghetto, then was moved to a series of concentration camps.

His daughter says that after he immigrated to America, he told a cousin with whom he lived in New Jersey that his job at Dachau had been to tend the ovens. The Nazis commonly used inmates for such purposes _ it was one of the few ways of surviving.

Newly arrived in America, Unger spoke to Newark newspapers of his years of torment, saying he escaped three times during marches between camps but was always recaptured.

At one point, he told the Newark Evening News, he was herded into a gas chamber at Natzweiler camp with 50 other prisoners, but they were spared at the last minute because some of them were electricians whom the Nazis needed for their war effort.

The two lives, briefly intertwined by the Holocaust and an album of photos and paintings, ended 17 years apart - Unger by hanging himself in 1972, Porulski in 1989 in St. Mary's Hospital near Hereford, England, of pneumonia and tuberculosis.

The death certificate gives his age as 74 and his profession as "painter (retired)."

Shari Klages was 12 when her father died.

He had just been laid off from his 18-year job in the aeronautics industry, and his wife had been diagnosed with brain cancer. His suicide is given added poignancy by the image of the hanged inmate in the album, and Klages believes it was his Holocaust experience that weighed most heavily on him.

"I have no doubt it was the most significant contributor to his death," she said.

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On the Net:

Dachau:

<http://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/englisch/content/index.htm>

International Tracing Service:

<http://www.its-arolsen.org/>

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