

## PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT

## Hidden Treasures, Hints of Tragedy

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Contributing Writer

In a small white room, tucked away in the Visual Arts building, Ann Weiss stands before a dozen silent observers. Numerous photographs line the walls of the room, each with a unique story to tell. A chill passes through the room as Weiss explains how she happened upon these forgotten photos in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi death camp, in October of 1986.

After being separated from a tour group in Poland, Weiss stumbled upon 2,000 lost photographs behind a locked door. Someone unauthorized, Weiss alludes, opened the door for her. These were the photographs Jews chose to take with them, when they were deported to the concentration camps. In Weiss' view, "though taken to a place of death, [these photographs] depict life."

"I knew nothing," Weiss said, shaking her head in disgust. "All they knew was that [these photographs] were dead Jews. All I knew was that they were dead Jews."

Weiss has made it her mission for the past 24 years to identify the faces in these photos and share their stories with the rest of the world. As Weiss sees it, "with these photos, they can be remembered as people, not bodies and in this sense, they live."

It is a huge responsibility, she admits, and tears fill her eyes as she apologizes for being the one left to tell these stories and not them.

The photos displayed in the Visual Arts building make up one section of a five-part exhibit brought to Emory — the other four sections are located in the Center for Ethics, the School of Medicine and Cannon Chapel.

Accompanied by a book, a documentary and a Web site, this exhibit is just one aspect of Weiss' project. With a Ph.D from the University of Pennsylvania in Education, Culture and Society, Weiss is the founder and director of the Eyes from the Ashes Educational Foundation and is an interviewer and analyst for the Transcending Trauma Survival Project at the University of Pennsylvania.

Those who gathered to view the exhibit hung on her every word, frowning when Weiss spoke of death — some brush away tears — and smiling, their faces lighting up, when she spoke of the vibrant lives these individuals lived.

One of the first photos in the exhibit illustrates a baby with porcelain skin lying on a fur rug — a traditional photograph for the era. Another depicts a nurse presenting a baby boy to his mother, who sits in a hospital bed, overjoyed.

In the next picture, the same boy is five years old. He sits between his smiling mother and father. The father wears a yellow star — bearing the word "Jude" — on his suit jacket. The year is 1942. Weiss tells us the boy did not live to see his sixth birthday.

The photographs cover a wide range: there are sports teams, school

pictures, women — wearing fur coats — walking arm in arm, mothers with their sons, friends laughing, children playing, people engaging in day-to-day activities — enjoying life.

A photograph of a well-dressed little boy on his first day of school catches my eye. In his hands, the boy holds a white cone filled to the brim with candy. Weiss explains that

See UNVEILED, Page 10 on the first day of school it was the Jewish custom to give the children these cones so they would identify the sweetness of learning with the sweetness of candy. The image of this little boy is the one that drove Weiss to begin her project: "I could not bear to have this child's face covered in darkness again — it was this child's portrait that first compelled me to bring these photos to the light."

The picture of the boy is also on the cover of Weiss' 2005 book, *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*, published by the Jewish Publication Society.

During a question-and-answer session after the presentation — before departing for an interview with National Public Radio — Weiss revealed the second half of the photographs' back-story. How had these photos remained hidden and undiscovered for so long after the

"All I knew was that they were dead Jews."

Arts Living





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**The above photo is one of many discovered by Ann Weiss depicting Jewish Holocaust victims before their deportation.**

