



Max Pinckers

Margins of Excess



**Dan Harris: Why did you do it?
Why did you tell such a big lie to
so many people for so long?**

**Herman Rosenblat: It was not a
lie, it was in my imagination, and
in my imagination, in my mind,
I believed it. Even now I believe
it. That she was there, and she
threw the apple to me.**

**Dan Harris: How can you say it
wasn't a lie? It wasn't true, and
you know it's not true.**

**Herman Rosenblat: Yes. It was
not true, but in my imagination, it
was true.**

Herman Rosenblat on Good Morning America with Dan Harris,
February 18, 2009



Holocaust survivors tell love story

Los Angeles Daily News, October 13, 2008

NORTH MIAMI BEACH, Fla. — In the beginning, there was a boy, a girl and an apple.

He was a teenager in a death camp in Nazi-controlled Germany. She was a bit younger, living free in the village, her family posing as Christians. Their eyes met through a barbed-wire fence and she wondered what she could do for this handsome young man.

She was carrying apples, and decided to throw one over the fence. He caught it and ran away toward the barracks. And so it began.

As they tell it, they returned the following day and she tossed an apple again. And each day after that, for months, the routine continued. She threw, he caught, and both scurried away.

They never knew one another's name, never uttered a single word, so fearful they'd be spotted by a guard. Until one day he came to the fence and told her he wouldn't be back.

"I won't see you anymore," she said. "Right, right. Don't come around anymore," he answered. Their brief, innocent tryst came ended.

Before he was shipped off to a death camp, before the girl with the apples appeared, Herman Rosenblat's life had already changed forever.

His family had been forced from their home into a ghetto. His father fell ill with typhus. They smuggled in a doctor, but there was little he could do to help. The man knew what was coming. He summoned his youngest son. "If you ever get out of this war," Rosenblat remembers him saying, "don't carry a grudge in your heart and tolerate everybody." Two days later, the father was dead. Herman was just 12.

The family was moved again, this time to a ghetto where he shared a single room with his mother, three brothers, uncle, aunt and four cousins. He and his brothers got working papers and he got a job painting stretchers for the Germans.

Eventually, the ghetto was dissolved. As the Poles were ushered out, two lines formed. In one, those with working papers, including Rosenblat and his brothers. In the other, everyone else, including the boys' mother.

Rosenblat went over to his mother. "I want to be with you," he cried. She spoke harshly to him and one of his brothers pulled him away. His heart was broken.

"I was destroyed," Rosenblat remembers. It was the last time he would ever see her.

It was in Schlieben, Germany, that Rosenblat and the girl he later called his angel would meet. Roma Radziki worked on a nearby farm and the boy caught her eye. Bringing him food — apples, mostly, but bread, too — became part of her routine.

"Every day," she says, "every day I went."

Rosenblat says he would secretly eat the apples and never mentioned a word of it to anyone else for fear word would spread and he'd be punished or even killed. When Rosenblat learned he would be moved again — this time to Theresienstadt, in what is now the Czech Republic — he told the girl he would not return.

Not long after, the Soviets rolled in on a tank and liberated Rosenblat's camp. The war was over. She went to nursing school in Israel. He went to London and learned to be an electrician.

Their daily ritual faded from their minds.

"I forgot," she says.

"I forgot about her, too," he recalls.

Rosenblat eventually moved to New York. He was running a television repair shop when a friend phoned him one Sunday afternoon and said he wanted to fix him up with a girl. Rosenblat was unenthusiastic: He didn't like blind dates, he told his friend. He didn't know what she would look like. But finally, he relented.

It went well enough. She was Polish and easygoing. Conversation flowed, and eventually talk turned to their wartime experiences. Rosenblat recited the litany of camps he had been in, and Radziki's ears perked up. She had been in Schlieben, too, hiding from the Nazis.

She spoke of a boy she would visit, of the apples she would bring, how he was sent away.

"That was me," he said.

Rosenblat knew he could never leave this woman again. He proposed marriage that very night. She thought he was crazy. Two months later she said yes.

In 1958, they were married at a Bronx synagogue, a world away from their sorrows, more than a decade after they had thought they were separated forever.

It all seems too remarkable to be believed. Rosenblat insists it's true. Even after their engagement, the couple kept the story mostly to themselves, telling only those closest to them. Herman says it's because they met at a point in his life he'd rather forget. But eventually, he said, he felt the need to share it.

Now, the Rosenblats' story has inspired a children's book, "Angel Girl." And eventually, there are plans to turn it into a film, "The Flower of the Fence." Herman expects to publish his memoirs next year.

Herman is now 79, and Roma is 76; they celebrated their 50th anniversary this summer. He often tells their story to Jewish and other groups, believing the lesson is the one his father imparted.

"Not to hate and to love — that's what I am lecturing about," he said. "Not to hold a grudge and to tolerate everybody, to love people, to be tolerant of people, no matter who they are or what they are."

The anger of the concentration camps, Herman says, has gone away. He forgave. And his life has been filled with love.



LIVE

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'S "MIRACLE"?



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A statue of the Virgin Mary at Saint Mary's Church in Griffith, Indiana attracts the attention of the faithful after noticing a tear running down the statues' cheek.

