LYN LIFSHIN

The Woman Who Wanted to Show Not the Evils of the Holocaust, the Striped Suits, Shaved Heads, Skeletal Faces

Yaffa Eliach shows the murdered towns people skating, skiing, laughing biking so they wouldn’t die twice. shot and buried in a bloody ditch in one day, then forgotten. She checked the National Archives, found only two photographs to add to the hundred her grandparents hid in litter boxes, boxes buried under bricks. So she took a loan against life insurance In Israel she helped a man dig up his pictures, buried more than 40 years ago in corroded olive tins. In Poland, a couple handed her a shopping list: television, jogging suits, Reeboks, in exchange for their set. In Boston, while helping a woman at an intersection she discovered halfway across that she was from the same village, too. In Canada, an old woman refused to give Eliach her snap shots until she apologized. The old woman insisted that Eliach’s mother had called her child “ugly as a monkey” back in 1930. The photographs make those thrown in the ditch individuals. She found photo labs that could reproduce pictures at all hours because relatives wouldn’t part with them even for a night. Nothing could be dropped from the photos. If a woman’s last pose showed her in the garden holding a tree branch, that branch had to be saved. In one photo of two young women on a doorstep, sisters in law both named Shoshana. with the same last name, scrawled on the back. “Shoshona with Shoshana Do you recognize us?” The day most of the town was slaughtered, the gunman told a Jew they’d let him and his wife live. Then he barked, “Shoshana.” Both women jumped up, naked from the edge of the grave. The man had to choose. He chose his wife. They shot his sister. Later the man and wife died too. 52 years later, the two Shoshanas lean toward each other lovingly.

Lyn Lifshin’s most recent book, Before the Light, was published this year by Black Sparrow Press, who also published her book Cold Comfort in 1997. Other recent books include Blue Tattoo and Marilyn Monroe. She has edited four anthologies of women’s writing, including Tangled Vines, Ariadne’s Thread, and Lips Unsealed. Her web site, www.lynlifshin.com, has selections from some of her 100 plus books, interviews, prose, and photographs.