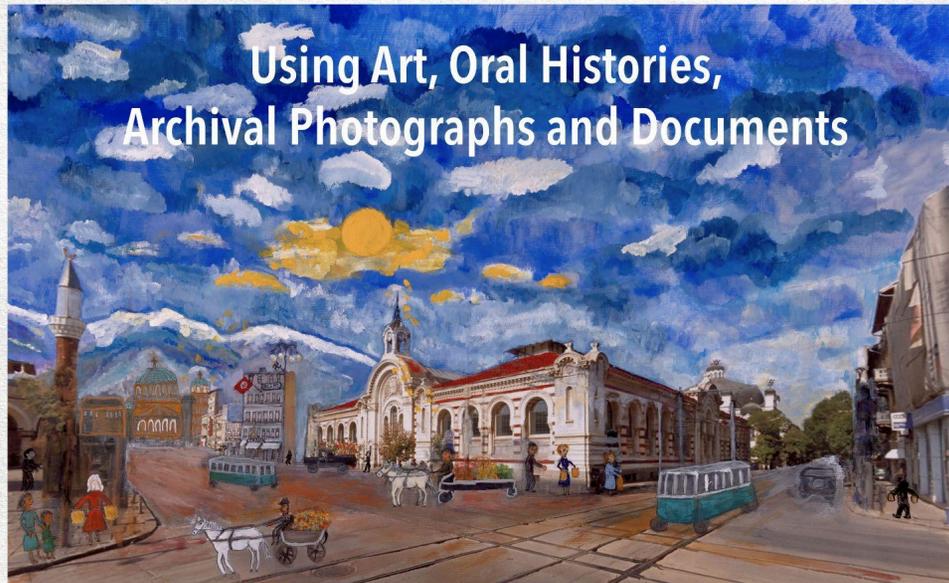


STORIES WE WERE NEVER TOLD

VISUALIZING THE HOLOCAUST IN BULGARIA AND BEYOND



Using Art, Oral Histories,
Archival Photographs and Documents

PAINTINGS BY MARTHA ALADJEM BLOOMFIELD

RESEARCH & NARRATIVE BY JACKY COMFORTY

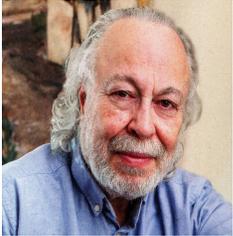
INAUGURAL EXHIBITION
January 22 - July 10, 2026

Holocaust
MEMORIAL RESOURCE & EDUCATION
CENTER OF FLORIDA

H Holocaust
Museum for
Hope &
Humanity

“Heartfelt thanks and gratitude to my late, dear cousin Patrick Kahn, whose support and inspiration helped spark enthusiasm for this project and encouraged us to expand our reach in creating a Jewish Pan-European narrative.” -- **Jacky Comforty**

The Creators



Jacky Comforty is an internationally acclaimed, award-winning documentary filmmaker, oral historian and researcher who has worked for over thirty-five years making films and videos in the United States, Germany, Israel, and Bulgaria. He has created, crafted and produced three full-length documentary films about the Holocaust in Bulgaria. *The Optimists 2001*, *Monument to Love (2023)*, and *Balkan Jazz (2024)* His two recent films are currently in the festival circuit and have won over 250 awards. He has conducted over the last 35 years oral history 150 interviews with survivors and eyewitnesses, at filmed on-location visits in Bulgaria, Northern Macedonia and Greece which he combines with archival document, film, and photograph research in a unique way of visualizing History, telling the Jewish narrative, while connecting individual stories with global events.



Martha Aladjem Bloomfield is an award-winning author, artist, oral historian, and independent scholar. Her published works focus on immigrants, migrants, and the formerly homeless.

They have collaborated on several creative projects. Their first book *The Stolen Narrative of the Bulgarian Jews and the Holocaust*, came out in April 2021, published by Rowman and Littlefield, in the series, Lexington Studies in Jewish Literature (now Bloomsbury). Comforty and Bloomfield also collaborated on Comforty’s most recent documentary film “Monument to Love” where they share script credits. The film is the winner of more than 250 international awards.

The Project

This is the story of our people, who lived through some of the most difficult times for humanity. Many of their generations perished but they were lucky to survive due to their resilience and the kindness of friends, neighbors and institutions.

These are the stories we were never told growing up. Parents do not tend to tell horror stories to their children. Sad memories are suppressed for the sake of creating an optimistic outlook of childhood and the future. We aim to reconstruct the story of the Holocaust in one country, Bulgaria, and the consequences it had for thousands of Jewish, Greek, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian victims and how its effects span all over Europe. A visual puzzle. Bits and pieces, combined to tell human stories of people long deceased and forgotten.



But the most important purpose of writing and painting this story is to give voice to those who were silenced, tortured, lost, drowned or forgotten. This collection of testimonies, images, documents and paintings, is dedicated to the memory of Jacky's cousin, Patrick Kahn, and to the victims of the Holocaust in Bulgaria and its role in the Final Solution.

"We offer this alternative perspective on the Holocaust in Bulgaria that includes stolen, silenced, but now reclaimed voices who experienced, witnessed and survived the tragedies," Comforty said. "We include oral histories of our people and friends who helped them, which fills a void in the Bulgarian Holocaust literature—specifically first-hand accounts of memory of survivors and eyewitnesses, photographs, official publications, laws, and newspaper articles.

"Very little visual documentation—films and photographs—exist specifically about the Bulgarian Jewish narrative of most of the tragic events during the Holocaust—peoples' stories of grief and trauma, abuse, violence, loss and tragedy," Bloomfield said. "As an artist in the surreal, primitive and naive genres, I became inspired to paint pictures of the Bulgarian Jewish peoples' stories to give them visual representation, to honor those who had lived or died and to help preserve their experiences and memories so others will know their stories."

The photographs in this exhibition serve as visual documentation of the material we uncovered during our research. The paintings, on the other hand, provide an interpretative lens for events with sparse or no visual records. Together, these elements create a tapestry of interconnected stories which span across the Balkans and all the way across Europe, illustrating the vast scope of the Holocaust. The spirit of the times is evoked through careful and nuanced use of these visual and auditory elements, weaving a more complex, interwoven narrative of the Holocaust. This reconstruction not only preserves memory but also re-imagines it, ensuring that future generations remember and understand these stories.

The Process

Jacky Comforty collected the oral histories and researched the narrative for this exhibit and Martha Aladjem Bloomfield painted pictures of real events based on Jacky's testimonials from individuals affected by the Holocaust and Bulgaria's collaboration with Nazi Germany, and on textual, auidal and visual research. Scholars from the United States, Bulgaria, Israel, Germany and France have endorsed their work which shares a complex tapestry of voices and memories previously underrepresented, ignored and denied

The Exhibit



For years, the Holocaust in Bulgaria was under-researched, under-represented, overshadowed and manipulated by political and economic interests. A myth became popular that there was no Holocaust in Bulgaria. The story of the Jewish people who had lived and survived these times has never been told. A combination of resistance, and political and social circumstances helped most of the Bulgarian Jewry survive the Holocaust, under very difficult, harsh conditions. Bulgaria's government refused to protect Bulgarian Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe and consequently they were deported to Auschwitz. Jews, who lived in territories which Bulgaria annexed, were deported and murdered in Treblinka. At least 12,000 Jews became victims of Bulgaria's collaboration in the Final Solution.

This exhibit closes a gap between testimonials and the lack of visual documentation and depiction of events. It links and contextualizes the events in Bulgaria with the Holocaust throughout Europe. Photographs, archival films and on location documentation, maps, documents, voices, paintings, and narration weave the story together.

Our aim is to innovate within the realm of visual and audio-visual history, showcasing how diverse materials can harmonize to craft a coherent narrative. We aim to reconstruct the story of the Holocaust in one country, Bulgaria, and the consequences it had for thousands of Jewish, Greek, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian victims. But the most important purpose of sharing this story is to give voice to those who were silenced, tortured, lost, drowned or forgotten.

To host our exhibit

Our exhibit debuted at The Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center in the City of Maitland, adjacent to Orlando, on January 22, 2026 and will run until July 10, 2026. It features the original fifty-two paintings along with texts and images, links to video and audio clips of oral histories with survivors and archival footage.



Modules of the Exhibition

The exhibition has multiple options for formats and modules for you to customize the exhibit to your specific space.



Life Before the War: This module addresses Jewish migration to the Balkans, Jewish identity and history, and Jewish integration into Bulgarian society. In Bulgaria, a combination of idealism and pragmatism strengthened the brotherhood between individual Bulgarians and Jews who lived near each other for generations. Relationships between religious leaders were important to avoid hate speech and foster dialogue. Antisemitism was minimal and never state sponsored.



Rise of antisemitism, Riots in Bulgaria and the Final Solution: The political and economic instabilities that followed World War I in Europe bore the seeds for World War II. The results included reparations and economic hardships and brought social unrest and political division. Bulgaria's economic dependence on Germany led to the infiltration of Nazi ideology and propaganda, resulting in the rise of pro-Nazi organizations in the 1930s in Bulgaria aligning Bulgaria more closely with Nazi Germany and enacted policies that discriminated against Jewish citizens.



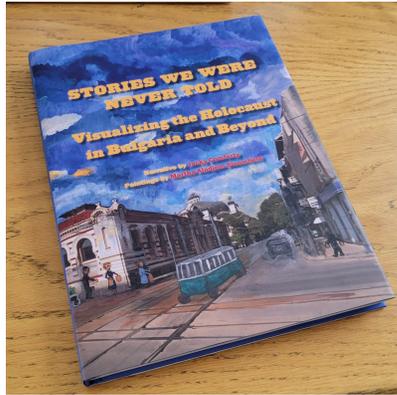
Jewish Resistance and Resilience: On May 24th, 1943, an unprecedented event took place in Bulgaria. An anti-deportation protest organized by Jews. This was the second attempt of the Bulgarian government to deport the Jews of Bulgaria. The Jewish leadership's successful coordination and mobilization of decent Bulgarians from all walks of life helped protect most of the community. Some 50,000 Jews escaped the fate of the 11,343 Jews Bulgaria deported to Treblinka.

Photos from the Exhibition Opening





The Books



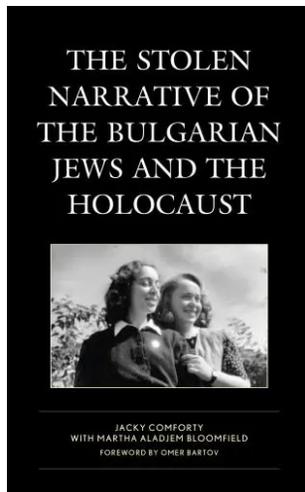
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"Jacky Comforty has carefully selected these survivor reminiscences from oral history collections. As an empathetic interviewer he developed a knack for getting subjects to freely speak their minds. He doesn't lead a witness, doesn't interrupt a train of thought, doesn't impose some preconceived narrative. And as an

award-winning filmmaker he perceives history in visual terms. As an artist so too does Martha Bloomfield via bold splashes of color. Her family background in Bulgaria connects her passionately with the topic. Jacky and Martha have accurately and tastefully presented this book as an antidote to a longstanding hoax. This book closes a gap between testimonials and the lack of visual documentation and depiction of events. It links and contextualizes the events in Bulgaria with the Holocaust throughout Europe. Photographs, archival films and on location documentation, maps, documents, voices, paintings, and narration weave the story together There was a Holocaust in Bulgaria. It's documented here. Stories We Were Never Told is a volume to keep, to cherish, to educate readers young and old. Turn the pages slowly and reflect. – Excerpts from the foreword by Steven F. Sage, Ph.D.

"Clearly, Jacky Comforty and Martha Aladjem Blomfield have put their hearts, their souls and a number of years of their lives into the creation of this work. Stories We Were Never Told expands and deepens their earlier collaboration, the Stolen Narrative of the Bulgarian Jews and the Holocaust. Though it meets the standards of any scholarly text, it surpasses any academic text in readability and pleasure. Perhaps, the best way to begin this book is sit down with it on a leisurely afternoon, perhaps with family members, and flip through the pages to view Bloomfield's moving paintings and the stories that accompany them. Then to come back to the stories over the years. Comforty and Bloomfield have finally given a voice to a group long silenced." – Nancy MacKay, Oral Historian and Writer

Martha Aladjem Bloomfield's emotionally expressive art plunges viewers into the eyes and hearts of the survivors of the Bulgarian Holocaust. The directness of her naive style with its charged colors and distinctive compositions holds and amplifies the survivors' lived memories of fear, vulnerability and loss. Each painting forms a new composite image fused from the diverse oral histories and extensive research conducted by writer and filmmaker, Jacky Comforty. The artist's paintings forge a necessary confrontation, and emendation of prior historical accounts. – Michele Foyer, artist



The Stolen Narrative of The Bulgarian Jews and The Holocaust shares a complex tapestry of voices of memories previously underrepresented, ignored and denied. An alternative perspective that includes stolen, silenced, but now reclaimed Jewish narrative based on our peoples' experiences. It contextualizes and personalizes our history, reconstructs the puzzle, praises those who helped the Jews and shares their exemplary acts of humanity for future generations.

It fills a void in the Bulgarian Holocaust literature—specifically first-hand accounts of memory of survivors, eyewitnesses, photographs, official publications, laws, and newspaper articles.

According to Omer Bartov, John P Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History, Department of History, Brown University, who wrote the Foreword to our book,

“What I find so powerful and moving in this book is the fine and delicate balance that it strikes between rejecting the self-serving story of how Bulgaria, alone of all other countries in Europe (with the partial exception of Denmark), and headed by its wily king, ‘saved its Jews’ and letting scores of witnesses tell their heart-wrenching stories of how they lived through those times.

“This book is thus an important corrective to the existing scholarship; but it is also a major contribution to the literature on the Holocaust in that it brings back the voices of the community itself, thereby allowing members of Bulgarian Jewry to tell their own story.”

Endorsed by scholars from the United States, Bulgaria, Israel, Germany and France.

Drawing on a rich collection of oral and visual sources, most previously unknown, this book presents an account of Bulgarian Jews and Bulgaria's role in the Final Solution like no other book on its subject. First-person oral testimonies and accompanying graphics make for engaging, gripping, reading. An historical narrative at its best!

— **Alvin Rosenfeld**, Center for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, Indiana University

This valuable contribution to the history of Bulgarian Jews and those under Bulgarian rule during the Holocaust offers a patiently assembled and processed collection of individual voices which blend into a telling polyphonic narrative. The myriad personal memories convincingly demystify well-established canonical stories and pay a deserved tribute to human decency.

— **Roumen Avramov**, Centre for Advanced Studies Sofia

Jacky Comforty is not only an avid collector of historical memories and visual sources of the Jews of Bulgaria, but also—as this book proves—the voice of the survivors. The book tells a story on the Shoah in the Balkans which is much more complex than the established varieties: a story of deportation and annihilation, but also one of solidarity and rescue.

— **Stefan Troebst**, Leipzig University

A compelling and very personal book whose rich, poignant testimonies provide a welcome addition to recent scholarship on writing and remembering Jewish history in Bulgaria. Alongside Jewish witness accounts, a wealth of photographs bring back to life the experiences of Jewish persecution during World War Two and successfully reclaim the Bulgarian Jews' roles in their own 'rescue.' The social lives of this collection of testimonies may also invite scholars to consider this volume as an object of research in its own right.

— **Nadège Ragaru**, Sciences Po, Paris

Award-Winning Films About the Holocaust in Bulgaria and Beyond

A series of four documentary films is based on a 40-year collection and documentation process, by Internationally acclaimed director Jacky Comforty who has hand-crafted this quadrilogy called **The Reclaimed Narrative** about Bulgarian Jewish life and the Holocaust in Bulgaria.

The Optimists: *The Story of the Survival of the Bulgarian Jews*, explores how different ethnic and religious groups stood by each other in Bulgaria even during the Holocaust. Bulgaria's experience offers valuable insight into how people can build bridges between communities of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and, in so doing, defend human and civil rights. It is not only a Jewish story. It is a universal one, powerful in its ability to inform and inspire all audiences. Completed in 2001, the film was the winner of the Jewish Experience Award at the Jerusalem Film Festival 2000 and won the Peace Prize in the Berlinale 2001. This is one of the most prestigious (and public) film festivals in the world.

Monument to Love features a journey of Jacky Comforty with his mother, Ika Comforty Ovadia, for over 25 years to research, document, and uncover the narrative of the Jewish people during the Holocaust in Bulgaria. As the journey progressed, Ika's personal story unfolded. She shares memories and reads passages from her diary which revealed her observations, thoughts and feelings, as a young woman, facing a broken world, plunging into war. Kind acts of friendship she experienced contrast the cruel times and the dangers she and others escaped. Ika's story is an anti-war manifesto, confronting totalitarianism and supremacy, and erecting a Monument to Love. Completed in 2023, the film is the winner of more than 250 international awards.

Balkan Jazz tells the life story and music of Niko Nissimov and his Jewish friends from the Bulgarian Jazz band, *The Optimists*. The movie charts their rise to stardom as a band in late 1930s Bulgaria. The beginning of World War II changed everything for them as Bulgaria joined the Axis powers. Anti-Jewish laws and restrictions brought the band to a halt. All men were drafted to slave labor camps, and the entire community was on the verge of extinction. Niko was saved by his friends at the last minute from a transport destined for the death camp of Treblinka. This testimony to friendship is layered with original music recordings of *The Optimists*. The private photo albums and archival footage help illustrate this amazing story of adventure, creativity, and endless optimism in the face of impossible odds. *Balkan Jazz* was completed in 2024 and the winner of a few dozen international awards.

Stories We Were Never Told is a film based on paintings by artist Martha Aladjem Bloomfield, archival video and film and testimonies of survivors. The project is a more expressive narrative animating the paintings and enhancing them with the testimonies. This film visualizes and vocalizes the Jewish narrative in Bulgaria and beyond.

Art Objects



Stories We Were Never Told

Exhibition Specifications:

Core:

- 52 original Paintings 36" x 24"
- 22 Panels of 18"X 24" informative panel
- 5 Panels of 18" x 12" - informative panel
- 23 Panels of 18" x 12" Paintings labels and added info
- 30 Panels of 18 "x 6" Paintings labels and added info
- 29 Panels of 4" x 24" Exhibit section headers
- QR codes linking to video & audio excerpts of survivors' testimonies throughout.

Venue Requirements

Minimum wall space length required: 200 feet

Minimum ceiling height: 7 feet

Standard rental period: 12-24 weeks

Installation time: 2 Days

Deinstallation time: 2 Days

Video.

5 iPad kiosks for visitor interaction and research of testimonies of survivors and archival videos, and photos

Books:

- [Stories We Were Never Told, Visualizing the Holocaust in Bulgaria and Beyond](#) is a 9" x 12" 256 page full album with all the art included in centerfold print and additional rich content.
- [The Stolen Narrative of the Bulgarian Jews and the Holocaust](#)

Films and previous award winning films:

- [Stories We Were Never Told](#)
- [The Optimists](#)
- [Monument to Love](#)
- [Balkan Jazz](#)

For smaller venues and budgets we suggest renting modules of the exhibition

For more information or to make a reservation
Please Contact: jacky_Comforty@comforty.com

The Paintings

Martha Aladjem Bloomfield is the creator of all 52 paintings that appear in this book. She completed this project over the course of five years, from 2021-2025, using gouache paint and sometimes, markers. Each painting is 2 feet by 3 feet.



The Ninth Roman Legion passing by the synagogue in Philippopolis, 2nd century AD.



A young Jewish woman posing for the camera next to Bulgarian women doing laundry in a stream. Ca. 1930s.



Maria Luisa Boulevard, the Central Market Hall, the Sofia Synagogue, and the offices of the Nazi Party.



Branik parade in the streets of Sofia.



Riots in Sofia cause much destruction; a policeman writes a ticket to the Jewish shop owners for littering.



Announcement posted on the door to the Plovdiv Synagogue telling all foreign subjects that they must leave the country.



Jewish family arrested for being "noncitizens." Deportation was the next step.



Arrival on a rainy night to the no-man's land between the borders of Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey.



Abuse and assault of the deportees.



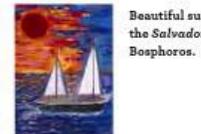
A gathering spot for deportees continuing the long walk to Ignatievo, which is on the Black Sea near the harbor city of Varna.



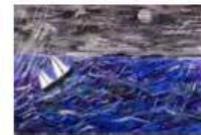
Forced and brutal deportation on the ships *Rudnichar* and *Cooperator*.



Sunrise over the Black Sea.



Beautiful sunset before the *Salvador* arrives at the Bosphoros.



The *Salvador* in the storm.



Drowning of many people after shipwreck of the *Salvador*.



The shore in Silivri strewn with bodies of the *Salvador* victims.



Family with radio marked for confiscation.



Leaving Sofia on the last train before the borders are shut.



Hard physical work in the slave labor camp.



A caravan of Greek refugees escaping from the Drama Massacre and lining up in front of the crossing to the German-occupied area.



Torture of Jenny Leble. Popov holding a whip inscribed with the words "I know everything."



Magirus-Deutz death trucks driven in Belgrade streets pass a bar where Bulgarian soldiers are eating and drinking.



Police raid, ID-card control, and arrest in the Jewish neighborhood in Paris.



Sara Karrasso and her daughter Ivonne evade the police who came to arrest them in the Vél d'Hiver action.



Arrival at Auschwitz. The Jews are sorted into two groups: men, and women with children. In the background, guards shoot someone who has tried to escape.



Roundups of Jews from Thrace.



A train with exhausted deportees stops near a labor camp; passengers were given food and water by nearby Jewish laborers.



Jews held at the tobacco warehouse in Dupnitsa are preparing to march to the train station.



Metropolitan Bishop Kiril speaks to the Jews in the Plovdiv school yard.



Jewish deportees embarking on the Karadorde in Lom. Final destination: Treblinka.



The gates of hell open to Treblinka.



Inside the Sofia Synagogue when the deportations and demonstration are announced.



The demonstrators find the Sofia Synagogue locked.



The demonstration starts at the small synagogue in Youch Bunar.



The demonstrators march in Boulevard Clementina near Beit Ha'am Jewish Community Center.



Police on horseback disperse the demonstration.



Sofia Police arrest more than 400 Jews following the demonstration.



The baker Rubin Dimitrov hid Jewish escapees in his bakery oven during the police raid.



Streets full of furniture belonging to Jews.



Many Sofia Jews slept on the floors of schools or community centers upon arrival at the deportation destination.



Zvi's trauma: German soldiers and Bulgarian militia parade dead partisans.



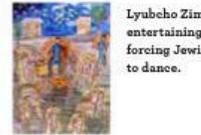
Somovit concentration camp, where a guard abuses Rabbi Zion. In the background, ships with Jewish refugees are stranded.



Jewish detainees in the concentration camp go under heavy guard to wash in the river and also communicate with the stranded Jews on the boats.



Lyubcho Zimriliev tears to pieces the letters the detainees at the Kayliaka concentration camp received.



Lyubcho Zimriliev entertaining himself by forcing Jewish prisoners to dance.



Fire in the concentration camp at Kayliaka.



Evacuating people from the fire in the Kayliaka concentration camp.



Chapay and Isaac Pardo lead a unit in the partisans' victory parade in Sofia on September 9, 1944.



Maria Luisa Boulevard in fall 1944, after the end of the war in Bulgaria and amidst the destruction left by the allied bombing.



Exodus from Bulgaria to Israel.



Despite trying to forget the bad and focus on the good, the trauma and fear never disappear.



Hope.