

# GEMS



CLAL

CLAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

Ranges in color of pink diamonds



**Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba** said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan:  
*No righteous person leaves this world before another is created.*  
*Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 38b*

**FERN KARESH HURST**

**W**hen my mother, Odette Bonnat, returned from the German concentration camp Ravensbruck just before the end of the war in 1945, everyone assumed that the Nazi horrors had rendered her infertile. Sent by the United Nations to Albania in 1948, my parents were happily surprised to learn that I was on the way.

In France sometime later, my dad spent the entire twenty-four hours it took for me to enter the world in the delivery room by my mother's side. Immediately after my birth, he went out onto the streets of Paris and bought a load of jewels from an elderly Russian lady who dealt in antiques. When he returned to the clinic, he covered my mother in them. As I grew up, occasional viewings of her jewelry case were mixed into a larger parable about my parents' love for each other, and for me. By contrast, the high British and French decorations my mom was awarded as a righteous gentile were never brought out for display. To this day, her name is not even inscribed on the Wall of Righteous Gentiles at Israel's Yad Vashem.

The sinking of the Lusitania inspired the great architect Philip Johnson's aunt, Theodate Pope Riddle — an architect, art collector, and passenger on the ship — to vow to build a magnificent school for

Marvelous warm silver wedding ring  
Ilya Schor, American designer  
c. 1950



boys were she to survive. She watched 1,147 men give up their lives so women and children could take lifeboats to safety. Having been one of them, she upheld her promise and designed Connecticut's famed Avon Old Farms school. My father was in one of the first classes there, where he learned to make jewelry as an extracurricular activity. When I was eight years old, he started teaching me. Small wonder I became a jeweler!

Our greatest literary critic, Edmund Wilson — the first author to write about the Dead Sea Scrolls — always had a saying in Hebrew displayed on his desk: Be strong, be strong, be strong. As my story shows, out of great tragedy and adversity, or what "The Tale of Genji" calls "enforced enlightenment," beauty can flower.

*Christopher Walling*

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