

## Foreword

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I am not unbiased about the author of this book.

On April 11, 1982, I drove from New Haven, Connecticut, to Riverdale, New York, to meet Hadassah, and I immediately fell in love with her. We were married less than a year later on March 20, 1983, in my hometown of Stamford, Connecticut. She has been my indispensable partner in life since that day. I can gratefully say I am even more in love with her than I was on the day we met.

Hadassah Freilich Lieberman is a gifted, good, and gracious person. She had an impressive professional life in the pharmaceutical industry until she married me, and, as we joke, I ruined her career. In fact, she continued to work part-time throughout my six years as Connecticut's attorney general and twenty-four years in the US Senate—first at a Catholic hospital in New Haven, then at two health care consulting firms in Washington, DC, and the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure for Breast Cancer.

In the midst of all that, she blended our four children into one family. As Hadassah says, we are both parents of all four, even though neither of us is the biological parent of all of them. And now she is the devoted and loving *Savta* (Hebrew for Grandma) to our twelve grandchildren.

This book is Hadassah's extraordinary life story. It goes from her birth in Prague, Czechoslovakia, to parents who survived the Nazi Holocaust; to her childhood far away from Europe as the daughter of

a rabbi in a small New England city, Gardner, Massachusetts; to her professional career in the pharmaceutical industry; to becoming my partner in our private and public lives; to her emergence as a national figure in her own right during our 2000 vice-presidential campaign.

The arc of Hadassah's life is a miraculous journey from the horrors of the Holocaust to the heights of American society. It is a story of survival and strength, inspiration and hope, and it will remind you, the reader, of the blessings of freedom and opportunity America gives to its citizens.

For me, Hadassah has provided unwavering love and support and the best and most honest counsel I could want. I could not have achieved whatever I have without her. Living with Hadassah has taught me a lot about life, especially about being the child of survivors and an immigrant to America.

Growing up Jewish in America after World War II, I was certainly aware of the Holocaust, but all my family had left Europe for the United States and Israel before the war. Marrying Hadassah brought me into the lives of her parents—her father a survivor of Nazi slave labor camps in Hungary, her mother a survivor of the Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps. As Hadassah describes them in the pages of this story, her parents were amazingly resilient. They pressed forward proudly after the war to build a life and family for themselves, first in Prague and then, after the Communists seized control of Czechoslovakia, in America. But they were forever scarred and shaped by the Holocaust, and so too was their daughter, and so too, through our marriage, was I.

Hadassah and her family brought me personally into the nightmarish Holocaust experience and all it teaches about human nature and the capacity of leaders and governments to do good and evil. It influenced my worldview and helped shape the policies I pursued in my public life, particularly in advancing the rule of law and human rights here at home and around the rest of the world, and supporting strong and realistic American foreign and defense policies.

I was born in America to parents who were also born in America, but all four of my grandparents were immigrants, and one of them—my mother’s mother—lived with us during most of my childhood and was like a third parent to me. In other words, I was not as personally distant from the immigrant experience as I was from the Holocaust experience before I met and married Hadassah. But, still, she and her parents were themselves immigrants, and that defined Hadassah and still does. She has great appreciation for the opportunities America gave her family, which native-born Americans too often don’t have. But she also remembers the difficulties and challenges they confronted as immigrants and the ways in which she was expected to help her parents work their way into and through life in America. The fact that her parents were immigrants has been a great motivator for Hadassah to work hard to succeed and, as her father would say, to “write your name in the sky.” During our 2000 national campaign, she did in fact write her name in the sky. I will never forget that night at the Democratic National Convention when Hadassah introduced me to accept the vice-presidential nomination and the delegates were holding thousands of signs with one word on them: “Hadassah.” During the campaign, she reached out to immigrants all over America from all over the world, and they warmly responded to and embraced her as one of their own.

Hadassah and I will always do all that we can to welcome and support new immigrants as our families were welcomed and supported by those who came to America before us.

I am very proud that my wife has written her story in this book and grateful that the distinguished Brandeis University Press is publishing it.

I know that in the pages ahead, you will learn a lot about Hadassah (maybe about me too) that you did not know before, and I know that you will enjoy and benefit from the words she has written.

*Joseph Lieberman*



## Preface

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Why have I decided to write this book? Why does anyone who has led what she believes is an interesting life want to share her insights, challenges, and lessons learned? Certainly, to help others and to give back. At the same time, there is perhaps a selfish reason: the telling provides a benefit to the teller. By choosing to put your life on display in this way, you are able to gain perspective and then move forward.

In some ways, my story is not unique. Like many other Americans, I am an immigrant—in my case, born in Prague, to two Holocaust survivors—and grew up a naturalized citizen in a small town in New England. A part of the workforce for decades, I've been married, divorced, and remarried. I'm a mother to both my biological and nonbiological children, and a grandmother. But I've also been privileged—and challenged—to be in the public eye as the wife of a prominent public servant, perhaps the role for which I am best known.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit the National World War II Museum in New Orleans. The exhibit underscores the impact the war had on everyone's lives, from the men and women in uniform to the families back home. Defeating the Nazis was truly a collective effort for our country and our allies. As part of the unfolding war narrative, the exhibit presents a massive color-coded map: red for the territories controlled by the Axis powers and blue for the Allies.

Witnessing the huge areas of red threatening to swallow up the entire map was alarming. Though this is a history that is familiar to me, it was distressing to see this visual about the anti-Semitism and hate propagated by the Third Reich and ponder how this evil might have enveloped the globe.

Like other children of Holocaust survivors, I grew up in the shadow of that evil—all the more reason why it's difficult to hear the anti-Semitic language being used currently in some quarters and magnified by the Internet, which contains the same vitriol and loathing of the “other” found in Nazi propaganda. Have we learned nothing from the past? I hope that my own story will serve as a reminder of the values inherent in our democracy and the need for greater tolerance and understanding rather than antipathy.

In this book, I have included the observations and recollections of some relatives, close friends, and colleagues. Though this is unconventional, especially in a memoir, I feel strongly about incorporating these other voices, particularly of my offspring. Their existence represents my ultimate defiance of Hitler's goal: the extermination of the Jewish people.

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me.

## Acknowledgments

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I acknowledge Judy Katz's patience in helping me put this book together. It was no easy task to cull through tapes, interviews, and drafts and organize a narrative spanning decades. Thank you, Judy, for your understanding of a difficult chapter in our history. To Mindy Werner: I appreciate your transparency, guidance, and acute understanding of the editing process, which ultimately led me to my publisher. Thank you to Sue Berger Ramin and the entire team at Brandeis University Press, as well as to Judith Cohen of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. For assistance and support, thank you to John J. DeGioia, president of Georgetown University; Carole Sargent, director of the Office of Scholarly Publications at Georgetown; and Mel Berger at William Morris Endeavor.

I am grateful to Eleanor Matorin, who, along with many others, welcomed my immigrant family to Gardner, Massachusetts, and became a dear friend to my mother and our entire family. I also recognize two old friends and classmates from Gardner: Levy Garbose and Avi Kamman. The story of my early years would not have been fleshed out as thoroughly without their perspectives and memories.

Levy's uncle acted as sponsor to my father, enabling us to settle in Gardner. Levy witnessed firsthand the adjustments my family, as immigrants, had to make in order to learn a new language and culture. In an interview, he recalled, "I am guessing most Holocaust survivors never said anything to their kids, especially when

they came here in the fifties. The smoke was still smoldering in Europe. This was stuff people never dreamed of happening and people didn't talk about it. But everyone gave the whole family great respect. They survived the Holocaust and came to a place where no one even knew what that was."

Avi Kamman's memories of my immigrant family touched me deeply. In an interview, he remarked how my parents were different: "It was like they had been dropped in from another planet. Yet there was something that drew me to them. Hadassah's parents' concerns had a deeper well of meaning behind them. You could tell that they had seen things we hadn't. When I sat with the rabbi and Hadassah's mother, Ella, I could feel that there was something there that was much deeper than the stuff I was involved in, but I didn't know what it was. I realize now I was on the road to looking for G-d, but I didn't yet have the words for G-d."

Michael Davis (Moshi Davidovicz, son of Itzi) represents another important piece of my history; he and his family survived the war thanks in part to the efforts of my mother and her family. How wonderful to have this fellow survivor and relative living in our neighborhood now.

My sincere thanks go to fellow carpooler Lisa Leval. Along with her husband, Gerard, and mine, we have shared many wonderful Shabbat meals together. It was through Lisa that I met Mindy Weisel and her husband, Shelly. When I was having a hard time with my mother, Mindy, whose mother was also a survivor, was just about the only person in my circle who could do more than commiserate; she could completely understand, since she had had similar experiences with her own mother. This was a source of great comfort. Mariella and Michael Trager deserve special thanks for their love and support during the challenging years we lived in Washington. Diane Braunstein, a work colleague and subsequent dear friend, introduced me to DC places beyond Capitol Hill. Marie Carr, another neighbor, was a helpful friend during all of Joe's campaigns

and became instrumental in organizing Joe's archives at the Library of Congress. Thank you, Debby Stepelman, for your friendship and editorial support. I also acknowledge Heather Picazio, a staff person in my husband's office, who worked so closely with me throughout the 2000 presidential campaign and after. In addition, I am grateful to Dan Nastu, who has helped me with all my tech needs.

I reserve my greatest acknowledgments for my family. I am grateful to have completed this book in the memory of my parents and in honor of my twelve grandchildren: Nesya, Willie, Maddy, Camilla, Eden, Yitzhak, Yoav, Akiva, Binyamin, Meir, Avraham Shmuel, and Shlomo. I also thank our four children—Matt, Becca, Ethan, and Hani—whose assistance was invaluable. Thanks, too, to my brother, Ary, and sister-in-law, Judy, as well as Joe's sisters, Rietta and Ellen, and their wonderful parents of blessed memory, Marcia and Henry Lieberman. And to my best friend, my Joey: thank you for your ongoing love and support, which made my work on this project that much easier.