



Istituto Comprensivo 1 "Antonio Scorcu"
Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado - Sede Centrale
Classi II A, II B e II C

Language Lab

"Readers in game"



Dear Uri,

Correspondence with Uri Orlev, author of the novel
"The Island on Bird Street"

2014-2015

Jerusalem, February 4th 2015

Dear Patrizia and Maria Luisa,

please read with your students the text of the supplement "The novel" and, please, do it before reading my answers.

Before I will answer the questions of your students I have to explain something. Many students, including those in Israel, want very much everything in the story to be a true story of my life and they want very much me to be Alex. This is not the case, this is not an autobiographical story about my self and I am not Alex. Many students, including those in Israel, want very much everything in the story to be true.

In a way, this is really more than a true story and I want to explain you and your class what I mean.

Take the Robinson Crusoe story, for example. This is a story which includes many events that really happened. In that time many people sailed in small wooden ships to the unknown world. Many of those ships broke apart in storms and sank. Some of the sailors managed to survive alone on an unknown island in one of the blank areas on the maps of that time.

Daniel Defoe (1660? - 1731) the English writer of "Robinson Crusoe", took some true stories of sailors and based his book mostly on the experience of one, Alexander Selkirk, who survived for four years on a small island called today "Isla Alejandro Selkirk", and not far from that one, on the new maps, there is also "Isla Robinson Crusoe", 500 miles west off the shores of Chile. (In the past the name was "Mas a tierra - Goat Island").

I gave the name Alex to my hero in the book in honor of the British sailor Alexander Selkirk.

Daniel Defoe collected stories like this and using his talent and imagination wrote one story which was an essence of all of those stories. This kind of a story I call more than a true story.

I tried to do the same in my book about Alex, but I took most of the story from my own experience.

I was in Warsaw Ghetto, in the time of the extermination, for more than 9 months. My experience was not exactly the same as Alex's, but many things that happened to him also happened to

me. We were in a factory, not a rope factory, but a factory for some parts of German soldier's uniforms. We were there with our mother, me and my little brother, and our aunt Stefania, who saved our life, after our mother was murdered.

I experienced the empty houses and streets and this situation is still very clear in my memory. Most of the flats were of poor people, but some were full of everything except for food and jewelry. So it was a very good background for my Robinson - Alex.

Thus you can understand that the book is based on some true stories or experience of mine, mixed with imagined events - things that happened, or could have happened, and maybe did happen to somebody else.

THE NOVEL



1. Just like Alex, do you believe you are born *under a lucky star*?

(Francesco Porrà)

Dear Francesco Porrà, yes, I can believe this. In my personal history I can find many reasons to do so.

2. Did you have a pet when you hid in the ghetto?

(Mattia Spiga and Alessia Fasciana)

No, I did not have any pet, only some doll-animals that have stayed with us from our childhood.

3. The revolt of the Jews is described in your novel. Did you take part in it? What can you tell us about?

(Francesco Ladu)

I was 12 years old. I didn't have my father's - like Alex had in the book - but I used to play war with my younger brother all the time.

4. What was your best moment in those years you never forget?

(Illona Diversy)

When we were told that the war ended.

5. What's the most important teaching to transmit to the new generations?

(Edera Rubiu)

To stay optimistic till the last moment.

6. Alex's mother was Zionist. Was Zionist your mother, too? What was the first thing you did as soon as you arrived in Palestine?

(Francesco Porrà)

My mother was not Zionist. The first thing I did when I arrived in Palestine, to a kibutz (you can find in Googel what is a Kibutz), I met the lady who took care of the new students in the boarding school. She asked me in Polish: «what is your name?» I said: «Yuri». And she said: «very good. It sounds like Uri», (a Hebrew name). Then she asked my younger brother: «what is your name?» He said: «Kazik». She thought for a moment and then said: «Your name in hebrew will be Igael». For the whole week, the poor boy was looking for me in the Kibutz and when he saw me, even if it was from far away, he shouted out: «Yuri, I forgot my name!»

7. What has been said by Boruch about Hitler struck me a lot. What do you think about Hitler and about what he did.

(Elena Scattu)

Hitler was guilty of the death of 6.000.000 Jews, 7.000.000 German and many millions of human beings in many countries.

8. Do you think there is someone who can really understand what you suffered?

(Mattia Spiga)

Suffering is a subjective feeling. Like all the other feelings of each of us. Each person reacts differently, and there is a big difference between the feelings and reactions of children and adults. As an adult, I can not really understand what I suffered of as a child, I can only remember and describe.

9. What was your worst fright when you hid yourself in the ghetto? What about now?

(Francesco Porrà)

When I hid in the ghetto, my worst frigth was the voices, steps and sounds of the the people who were looking for us - policemen, germans, or some others. Knocking on the walls, on the roof and so forth. And then you can't cough, sneeze, you are affraid to breath.

10. Sometimes Alex cried. Was there a moment of big discouragement even for you? Have you ever thought not to love your life anymore?

(Francesco Ladu)

When I met university students in the city of Porto, Portugal, one of the students asked me: «Did you cry all the time while you were in the ghetto?»

How can one make people everywhere, and here too in Israel, understand that all through the Holocaust of the Jews in Europe, which most visualize as hell on earth, people actually lived. How can one explain, to those who seem to think it inconceivable, that people laughed, cried, argued, had babies, told jokes, cheated on each other, deceived each other, and treated each other with kindness... until they died from typhus or hunger, or until they were murdered in the gas chambers of Treblinka. At first I replied that I cried only when I hit my little brother and Mother spanked me. But then I remembered that wasn't true. I didn't cry, I only screamed so that the neighbors would think that Mother was abusing me. Nevertheless, I remembered that I had cried in the ghetto on one occasion. It was over a book. It was on my birthday, February 1941 or 1942. Mother asked me what gift I wanted. I told her I wanted the poems of Adam Mickiewicz, the greatest of Poland 's 19th century poets. Mother agreed. We went to the bookshop. The shopkeeper showed us a volume of all Mickiewicz's poems, it was a large book with a red cover, and the profile of the poet was not painted but impressed on it. You could feel it.

Mother asked:

«How much is it?»

And the Man said:

«Fifteen zloty.»

«No, it's too expensive», she said, and off we went.

When we were on the street Mother looked at me and asked:

«Jurek, why are you crying? All right, come on, I'll buy you the book.»

As about your second question the answer is: NO, Never.

11. Alex was looking for food and for books. Looking for books, in the situation, struck me a lot. Did you read in those days? What was your favourite novel? What about today?

(Francesco Ladu)

Please think about 6 years in your life. There is a war. But not all the time. You must be hidden for long periods of time. You have to wait for hours for your mother, for your aunt. This takes days, weeks, months. All this time I was reading - if I found books. But much more I was playing with my younger brother a war game. At the time, my aunt used to send me out with two young men from the factory to search for coal to heat our room. I also looked for children's rooms. If I found a tidy children's room, I looked for two things: stamps, because I collected stamps, and books that I hadn't yet read. When I'd return to the factory, I'd have big fights with my brother. He wanted half of everything. The stamps were not much of a problem - I just gave him the flawed, torn ones. With the books it was a little trickier. I told my aunt I didn't want to let him read first because he reads too slowly. I'd finish reading my book and he'd still be stuck with his, and I wouldn't have the patience to wait. But that wasn't true. I just wanted to have first dibs on the books' heroes for my army. At the time, books, or more precisely the heroes of the books, were becoming a very substantial part of our life, mine and my brother's day-to-day lives. We spent days on end alone, whether in hiding places, basements, attics, or in our room at the factory. It was a war game. Each one had a large army, and each one was surrounded by his band of generals who came from the books. Sometimes, we played in the dark, whispering in some basement or in a hiding place in the attic. Each one would say what he was doing. Other times, we played in broad daylight on the floor of our living room, when Mother and Aunt Stefa went off for twelve hour shifts. But I was in charge of listening all the time - I did it only with one ear - to make sure that the Jewish or Ukraine policemen weren't coming to look for children. If so, my job was to push the game underneath the bed and go into hiding with my brother.

Sometimes we played with lead soldiers, and if we didn't have any, anything that could be knocked over with a coin could be used instead. At one time, chess pieces that I collected in the empty houses, which remained full of belongings, served as our

soldiers. The heroes from our books, who became the generals of our armies, were very real. They were leading our armies when we were at war, marching on our marches, and enjoying themselves in balls or receptions we held in each other's honor. I can still remember most of the names. There were the heroes of the trilogy by the Polish writer Sienkiewicz, some in my army and others in my brother's army. There was General Napoleon, General Captain Nemo and other of Jules Verne's heroes; General Old Shatterhand and General Ironhand and other characters from Karl May books. I had General Last Mohican, General Robinson Crusoe and a whole bunch of generals from Cooper's books; I also had General Gordon, not the Zionist pioneer, of course, but the heroic British General who I drafted to my army after reading a book by Sienkiewicz called In Desert and Wilderness. He played a very important role in our lives, later on. The other heroes that come into my mind, at the moment, are General Washington and General Achilles. One of the generals I couldn't forgive my brother for snatching was General Robin Hood. He called dibs on him not after reading the book, but after listening to one of Mother's stories. Suddenly, he just jumped up and called dibs before I could think of it myself. Under no circumstances did I manage to buy him off my brother with money, which I manufactured myself, or to kill him at war, because my brother would cheat and move his name around from one soldier to the other. And he refused to exchange him for anything, and at any cost. He also got away with calling dibs on General Moses, from Grandma's stories. Grandma used to tell us bible stories. By the way, I called dibs on Don Quixote, but my brother outmaneuvered me in asking for Sancho Panza. This, I couldn't stand for. It ended without a fight this time: Jules Verne's Passepartout for Sancho Panza.

General Robinson Crusoe came back into my life when I was fifty years old, writing the book The Island on Bird Street.

12. Alex envies the girl who goes to school. Did you miss the school?

(Nicola Soro)

Yes, I missed going in the street, going to school with all other children.

13. What was the worst and dangerous day for you in the ghetto? (*Matteo Lobina*)

When we was caught and brought to the place where the Jews were pushed into the train wagons to be sent to the death camp, to the gas chambers in Treblinka.

14. Just like Alex, did you have dangerous encounters in the ghetto?

(*Nicola Soro and Francesco Ladu*).

Of course, and many more.

15. Boruch sacrificed his life for Alex. Do you know some heroic act in the ghetto?

(*Matteo Lobina*)

I personally don't know. But I'm sure there were many heroic acts in the ghetto. There were 450 000 Jews In Warsaw Ghetto. Think about parents, men and weman who loved each other...

16. Alex didn't keep a diary. If you had some ink would you have kept a diary?

(*Matteo Lobina and Francesco Porrà*)

I did't, but I had a name for my diary if I would have written it: «May be...» (May be we will survive)

17. Alex was in love with Stashya. What about you? Did you have a girl-friend when you were twelve years old?

(*Nicola Soro*)

Yes. It was in Bergen Belzen, in Germany. Her name was Julia (in Polish).

18. Have you ever thought to escape from the ghetto like Yurik Friedman?

(Francesco Ladu)

Yurik Friedman lost his family in the big Warsaw ghetto. I didn't. Our mother and our aunt tried to smuggle us from the ghetto to a Polish family in the other side of Warsaw, but we were caught. On another occasion, after our mother was murdered, the aunt managed to smuggle us once more and she succeeded.

19. A lot of people compare your book with "Robinson Crusoe". Do you compare yourself with Robinson?

(Francesco Porrà)

Definitely, please the text I have sent to your teachers.

20. Alex says he played football with his friends in the ghetto. What were your favourite games before the deportations?

(Elia Randazzo)

All the games that the children used to play outdoors before the arrival of the computer.

21. Is it similar your rejoining with your father with that of Alex and his father? Can you tell us how it happened?

(Ilaria Carracoi)

I wanted very much a father like Alex's father but I haven't. But there was a moment when he came back to me... (the full answer is in the second e-mail)

22. Have you ever come back to Warsaw in the places where you lived when you were a child? What did you feel?

(Matteo Gomiero)

The first time I came to Warsaw was when Communist Poland opened to western visitors in 1989. I went to our flat in a suburb of the city. I knocked at the door. A young lady opened the door.

I introduced myself. She said: «Please come in». And then - suddenly I understood deeply, in my senses, (like the senses of an animal - not in my human intellect or logic), that my mother was not there any more...

23. Did you want to become a doctor like Alex?

(Roberto Ferrelli)

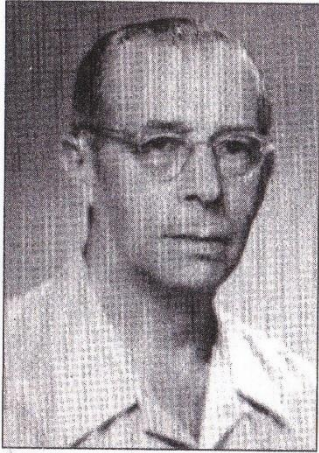
I do not remember that I wrote about Alex's plans to become a doctor. But, as to myself, (I am not Alex) I can tell you a story: When I was in Japan meeting young adults, one of the girls asked me: "you are the first son of your father the doctor, so how it can be that you did not become a doctor yourself?" I answered: "If not for the war, I would have certainly become a doctor, like my father. (That how it was in my family as well as it is today in Japan). But since there was a war... I could become whatever I wanted. And I always wanted to tell stories..."

24. Have you ever thought to kill a German to save a Jew?

(Mattia Spiga)

You mean to ask if I did what Alex in the book have done. The answer is no. I never killed a German. I was a kid and had no gun.

Translated by Mrs Antonia Ladu



*Mio padre dopo
il suo arrivo in
Israele, nel 1954.*

Sì, ritrovammo papà un anno dopo la fine della guerra, grazie all'indirizzo di un lontano parente a Londra che era stato distribuito a tutta la

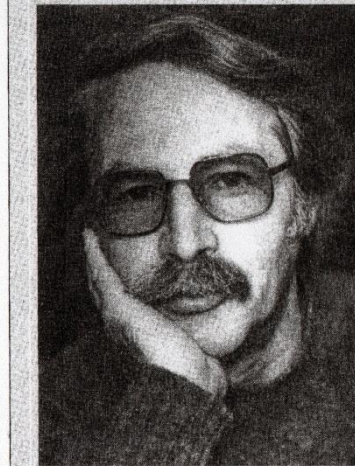
famiglia all'inizio dell'occupazione tedesca. Dapprima papà ci scrisse al kibbutz dicendo che stava studiando l'ebraico, che sarebbe venuto in Israele e che adesso aveva capito che non il comunismo avrebbe risolto il problema ebraico, bensì il sionismo. «Gli ebrei smetteranno di essere vittime solo quando avranno una loro terra» scrisse. Ma un'altra lettera ci annunciò che si era risposato, e che lui e sua moglie «lavoravano per mettere da parte i soldi per i nostri studi». Mio fratello domandò: «Quali studi? In Polonia?» E scoppiò a piangere.

La nuova moglie di papà mi mandò delle poesie in polacco che diceva di avere scritto lei. Erano invece del poeta Julian Tuwin. La odiai. Mio fratello scrisse a papà:

«Come hai potuto dimenticare quella moglie: Zofia Orłowski!»

Troncammo i rapporti. Ma poi un giorno, dopo sette anni di silenzio, papà comparve in Israele. Era scappato via dalla moglie polacca e dalla Polonia, che all'epoca era un paese chiuso, non se ne poteva uscire né entrare. Mi si buttò al collo, ma io rimasi gelido; erano passati quindici anni dall'ultima volta che c'eravamo visti, per me era un estraneo.

In Israele papà si risposò e si mise a lavora-



Uri Orlev, 1990

re al servizio sanitario. I rapporti fra noi rimasero freddi. Ci vedevamo due volte all'anno fra le cinque e le sei del pomeriggio, per una tazza di tè. A volte passavo a trovarlo allo studio di radiologia. Quando arrivai lì la prima volta, mi disse con un sorriso soddisfatto:

«Le infermiere erano stupefatte. Non sapevano che avessi un figlio». Poi scoppiò a ridere e aggiunse, come mettendomi a parte di un segreto:

«Se non racconti niente di te alla gente, loro come fanno a sapere...» Era molto gentile con i pazienti e cercava sempre di capire dove stava il problema, parlava con garbo e ascoltava con pazienza. Mi piaceva vederlo così. Ma quando gli chiedevo di raccontarmi di lui e di mamma, di come s'erano conosciuti, di che cosa gli era successo durante la guerra, alzava le spalle e diceva:

«Non c'è nulla da raccontare».

Quando andò in pensione continuammo a vederci due, tre volte all'anno fra le cinque e le sei del pomeriggio per una tazza di tè. Solo che non finisce così. Quando papà morì mi fu chiesto di identificare la sua salma, come vuole la prassi. Entrai in una piccola stanza. Papà era coperto da un lenzuolo bianco, solo

il viso era fuori, e gli occhi aperti. In quel momento tornò a essere il mio papà, come una volta, come all'inizio. Tutto fu perdonato e dimenticato: ecco di nuovo il papà che ricordavo, il papà con cui andavo a remare sul fiume d'estate e le cui orme seguivo con gli sci nella neve luccicante, d'inverno. In quel momento tornò a essere quella stessa persona che tanto avevo amato quando, sotto quel sole d'inverno, facevamo insieme la strada fra i campi imbiancati della campagna polacca.



Mio padre nella stazione sciistica di Zakopane, in Polonia, nel 1938.

These are some pages, sent by the author, which answers the question 21.

(Gioco di sabbia)

Today, we read and commented on the answers that Uri Orlev sent us by e-mail. Write your impressions, relatively to the responses in general or to anyone in particular.

Tortoli, February 4th 2015

Keeping in touch with a famous writer as you it's not a common thing.

This is a huge privilege for us. Even an American group of students from Jericho, Vermont loves your novel and wants to share this experience with us, sending videos and messages to you. My classmates and I jumped for the joy when we got your email.



I really appreciate that a gentleman like you, wrote nine pages to answer our questions; I can imagine your effort!

Honestly I liked all your answers, but mostly I loved the one in which you said that the first thing you did, after arrived in Palestine, it was going to kibutz and change your name. I cannot explain why I liked that answer maybe because it was touching and heart breaking.

(Francesco Porrà)

I appreciated all of Uri Orlev's answers, and now I can say to know him better. They were so complete and exciting.

I liked the fact that the author has revealed that he and Alex are not the same person. I was impressed by the games that he used to do with his brother playing war, calling their toy soldiers with the names of the protagonists of their favourite stories. This made me realize how much he loved reading.

I liked the answer to the question "Have you ever cried like Alex did?" where the writer remembers that he cried after his mum could not buy him his favorite book of poems.

The last answer that I liked was the description of his fears: the voices and the footsteps of the German soldiers. I imagined you in the ghetto with the fear to breathe, but at the same time I thought about his optimism to keep going on.

(Margherita Ludovico)

When our teacher read the first part of Orlev's answers, that is, one in which he explained that he is not Alex, I was disappointed because I loved to think Alex was an autobiographical character.

I liked the question of Illona, where he asked what was his best moment. His response was "When they told us that we were free, that the war was over." If I was you, I would have been very happy too.

His answers are beautiful and complete, because in some of them he tells us about his life in the ghetto. And I really appreciated his answers.

(Elia Randazzo)

The answers written by Uri Orlev were all interesting and complete.

(Edera Rubiu)

When Uri Orlev answered questions, I was very impressed when he said that an adult cannot understand the pain suffered by the child. It struck me because it is true. This makes one think how lucky we are and also what he has suffered, even in silence, because he could not do anything. Almost he could not breathe for fear of being taken away, nor complains.

(Illona Diversy)

"Do you think anyone can understand the pain she felt?". This question I really liked it. In my opinion, no one can understand the pain felt during this massacre. You can understand only if you live the same experience.

But I still cannot understand the courage to kill another man. I don't understand how a person can kill a child. I loved the way you answered. And I think it's very important to remember.

I tried a lot of interest even when you told us of your coming back home in Warsaw, where you realized that your mother had gone. The vision of his house without his mother, evidently it confirmed her absence.

I liked all your answers. I think our exchange is interesting and unique because we learn much more than from the books. We can learn from the author's stories and from his real voice.

I also loved the answer about Hitler. It was my question. You did not tell in details what he did to destroy the Jews. You only said that he killed, that he is a murderer.

I am sorry for what you suffered.

(Elena Scattu)

I was pleased that Uri Orlev has returned, after long time, at home. If I were him, I would have done the same thing. I liked the answer about he was crying in the ghetto. He cried only once. Although he was in trouble he did not cry.

(Immacolata Melis)

I was excited to know that Uri returned to revise his house and opened another woman: only then he realized that his mother was gone.

(Mattia Aversano)

It was nice the way you responded, I appreciated the patience, also because the questions were a lot. It is an honor to keep in touch with you, with one of the few still living survivors

of World War II. The thing I liked most was to know even though you had a bad time in the ghetto, you returned to Warsaw, where you spent his childhood.

(Francesco Lai)

I think that the answers given by Mr. Uri Orlev have been complete and comprehensive. What excited me the most is when he said that Hitler killed millions of people. But another exciting answer was when he said he was back in his old house and he heard that his mother was gone.

(Matteo Gomiero)

I'm very sorry for what happened to you and to the other Jews.

(Alessia Fasciana)

I liked the response when he told to be back, after forty years, in Warsaw, in his old house. Another lady opened the door. He understood only then that his mother was died.

(Ilaria Carracoi)

I was very impressed that he kept his old toys as memories. Then when he told about the games he used to play with his brother. I liked it because he was with his brother and because they had a lot of imagination.

In absolute terms, however, the most touching moment was when he told us about his happiness at the end of the war.

(Sissi Greco)

According to me, it is a great thing to be in contact with Uri Orlev, because he is a very educated person and he decided to be in touch with us. I was pleased, he answered our questions. I was impressed when he told us that, after forty years, he

returned to his old house. And he realized that his mother was dead when another woman opened the door.

(Daniele Todde)

The answer that most impressed me is the one in which he says that then he missed the school and wanted to go with his friends. I was very impressed because at his place I do not know what I would have done. It was interesting for me when he told of life in the ghetto, how they should be quiet. If it happened to me I would be sad because I cannot be quite and sit for a long time, I need to move.

(Simona Mirai)

Tortoli, February 9th 2015

I was struck by your story and your father's story, it is a fairy tale, moving and very beautiful. I liked the fact that you were able to forgive everything to your father.



The descriptions were fabulous, rich in detail and I could imagine everything.

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer us and also for the fact that during all that time, it has always been optimistic and thought about Love.

I was moved to think about all that you felt and you endured. Things that today seem like a film, impossible things that become possible only in our imagination.

(Eleonora Soro)

The answer that struck me most was the story between you and your father. I wonder how you did not talk to him for all that time and why you forgave him after his death. In my opinion your father had to know those things while he was still alive.

(Ishane Aniba)

Among all the answers that the author has given, struck me particularly that in which he tells of when they were hidden in the ghetto. German soldiers arrived and banged into the walls, to see if there was anyone; who was inside could not cough, sneeze, almost could not even breathe. If you breathed deeply, you could be discovered, captured and taken to the death camps.

I was impressed by this story. How can a person live like this? Live in fear and paying attention at noises and footsteps. I do not know what it means to live in a period of war, but I would not want to suffer as the author suffered.

(Serena Tosciri)

I appreciated that a famous writer like you had responded us. All responses are fine, but the one I prefer is when you told us that you were optimistic. Despite being a short answer, it means much.

(Isa Marteddu)

Dear Mr. Uri Orlev,

I was so excited to read your answers and helped me to understand how difficult it was to live in those days. She has had a very difficult life, but at the same time beautiful and exciting. I liked the fact that you were always optimistic.

(Marika Fanni)

In general, I can say I was very impressed by many facts: from your jealousy of books, from your love for the girl (Julia) and the relationship with your father, especially the latter.

I can not imagine your pain when you realized your mother's death, or the second marriage of your father.

I am touched by your story. The fact that you have had optimism surprised me, especially in the situation in which you were involved.

(Francesca Secci)

I loved the response Mr. Uri Orlev sent us. The most beautiful message that impressed me and my class mates was the message pf

optimism. It was nice you have had patience to listen and to respond our questions.

(Rebecca Mattana)

I was very impressed that you had a girlfriend while you were in the camp of Bergen-Belsen, because I did not think, at that time, that a boy could fall in love during the war.

(Cristian Schiattarella)

Dear Mr. Uri Orlev,

You past experiences moved me a lot and also the fact that you want to share your life with us. The answer that I preferred was the one about your desire to live and continue to hope that everything will get better. Your optimism is more than admirable.

(Cristina Piras)

I was really impressed by your ability to remain optimistic despite all the disasters and suffering you endured when you were of the same our age. Along with your brother you could imagine a fantasy world and at the same time you controlled if the Germans were coming to take you away.

(Giulia Soro)

I have no words to describe the greatness of your answers. I do not know how to say it. Thank you, thank you very much for everything. The new generations do not know what it means to really suffer. You calmly managed to explain it. Even the short answers means very much for us.

(Nicola Soro)

One response in particular struck me: the one in which you tell that you never thought of not loving life more. You were always

optimistic and still you are. I think you are a very strong person, because, despite having lived bad experiences, you remained a strong person. Surely you lived in a terrible time, and, if I had lived in that time, I might have been sad. Your strength left a mark in my heart and mind.

(Chiara Milan)

Dear Uri Orlev,

I think you have been patient and kind to answer our questions and curiosity.

One thing that struck me was when you said that because of certain noises you were afraid even to breathe. Just thinking, in your place I think I would have chilled the blood in the veins.

One thing that struck me about you is optimism even in such critical situations.

(Eugenio Murru)

We read your answers. They hit me. I was impressed when you told us to be optimistic and that's because I am optimistic too; sometimes, if I desire an impossible thing, I hope till the end that my desire could happen.

Then, the other touching answer for me was the story of you and your father. I would have forgiven him only in part, but then you did well in your heart to forgive him even if he was already dead. Thank you for sending us the photograph of your father, you look like the same. I also thank you for the effort you took with our classes.

(Matteo Lobina)

I liked the answers when you told what you were doing, of what was the worst day for you and what were your fears. I'd be scared too if I had heard noises and especially during the day because

at night you could not see. Then you intrigued me when you told when you were playing at war.

(Nicola Serra)

There are many answers that have impressed me and others less. What I liked best is when you told that, after killing your mother, your aunt Stefania saved them. This answer I liked most because I imagined that her aunt had a lot of courage and was not afraid of being killed, because the only thing that mattered to her was the life of her grandchildren.

(Roberto Ferrelli)

Tortoli, February 10th 2015

For some answers I was disappointed, while others hit me. For example, I was disappointed that you did not have a pet, because from what you told in the novel seemed you had one. Instead regarding the killing of the



soldier, I expected that it was not actually happened to you. A child can not commit such an action, even if it is in that situation.

I was curious about the fact that, despite the war, you and your brother do not be stopped to have fun and be kids.

I agree about what you said on the books, that is, they are a way to have fun and have something you are passionate about.

I know that you were in love during the war. How was it? What was Julia like? Did she have the same feelings? Have you ever kissed? How did you meet her? How long did your love last?

(Maria Trebini)

Mr. Uri Orlev,

your answers struck me because they showed exponentially the difference between biography and fiction, between Uri and Alex.

One of the answers that most impressed me is when you say that you and your brother were playing war games, but when the war was around the corner, a constant danger. The most impressive, however, is when you tell the story of your brother's name, he could not remember his name.

(Luca Deiana)

Dear Uri,

your answers have impressed me a lot, the way you respond, to tell your life experience, to talk about a terrible thing, which unfortunately really happened.

In fact, I am sad for this, but I have to congratulate you on your great capacity for creativity and for the courage to face touching and strong arguments of your childhood. I'm sorry you did not have a father who helped you to grow. I think and hope that the fact of writing about a boy, whose only hope was the father, helped you.

Finally, I would like to thank you for having paid attention and for having responded. I hope with all my heart that you have enjoyed communicating with us, even at a distance. Greetings.

(Elena Sardanu)

Dear Uri Orlev,

we all looked forward to your answer, especially me. It would like to me to know that many of the events recounted in the novel were true. I loved the response about the book of poetry, that it was too expensive. It struck me that, when you're back in your house, you've realized that your mother was dead. I'm surprised that despite the war, you and your brother were playing and I think that despite the war there was a lot of hope. Affectionately.

(Sara Scigliuzzo)

By your answers I noticed the big differences between the story told in the novel, the film and the author's biography. I think you're a great man, because you were able to overcome the racism of the Germans before in the ghetto and later in the concentration camp. I wish you lots of merry years. For your birthday I would like to wish you.

(Davide Secci)

As a good reader, the question that struck me most was that when we asked what was your favorite novel. The answer satisfied me, I was hoping there was another novel addition to Robinson Crusoe, although I do not understand the interest in a book of poems that, yes, it can be a passion, but I think that to a child of six years 11-12 years can enjoy a fantasy book or adventure. Reflecting I would ask if you need to read a lot or if you were really fond of that kind.

(Gabriele Cucca)

Dear Uri Orlev,

I really liked the answer that you gave, saying that you have not stopped loving life, not everyone in your place would have done. It struck me that, despite all the bad things that brings the war, you have been very strong to be able to overcome it and that, even today, despite everything you continue to love life. I tell you that at your place I would have continued to love life, because it is a valuable asset that has been given us. We all know that war changes everything, overwhelms all the habits of everyday life of any person; no one can leave the house, no one can see, for a long time, their friends and relatives.

To me, the war is a terrible thing. With this sentence I say goodbye.

(Ilaria Demurtas)

I thought you had a pet to talk to, or spend your time, as it happened with Alex and his mouse Snow.

(Luca Pitzalis)

Dear Mr. Orlev,

the answer that impressed me the most is when you say that you were playing at war with your brother. Please, can you explain to me, how did you play at war games? And then I was impressed when you told that you fought with your little brother for books and stamps. Goodbye. *(Mara Piras)*

I loved your novel very much. Bye!

(Luca Cucca)

Dear Uri Orlev,

your story really struck me and made me think about how lucky we are to have certain things and also so much love in hard times.

An answer that you gave in which I see myself is the one where you talked about the relationship with your younger brother. Well, I also have a younger sister, with whom, like you, at times play and joke, but in others we fight. With these words I finish, I hope that these few lines will have pleased you and I'm glad to have had the opportunity to read your beautiful and adventurous novel, which witnesses the life of that period.

Greetings.

(Stefania Moss)

Translated by Mrs A. Leopaldi

Jerusalem, February 15th, 9:05 PM

My answers to your last questions:

«Please, can you explain to me, how did you play at war games?»

(Mara Piras)

I enclose 2 photos which were taken 30 years ago from an Israeli TV production. This was a drama play which described two boys - me and my younger brother - playing a war game. We used to play this way in every place we were hiding. When the conditions did not enable us to play with real soldiers figures (for example in darkness) we did it only by telling each other in which acts are our armies involved.

The great game 1: I am instructing the two actors how to play the game.

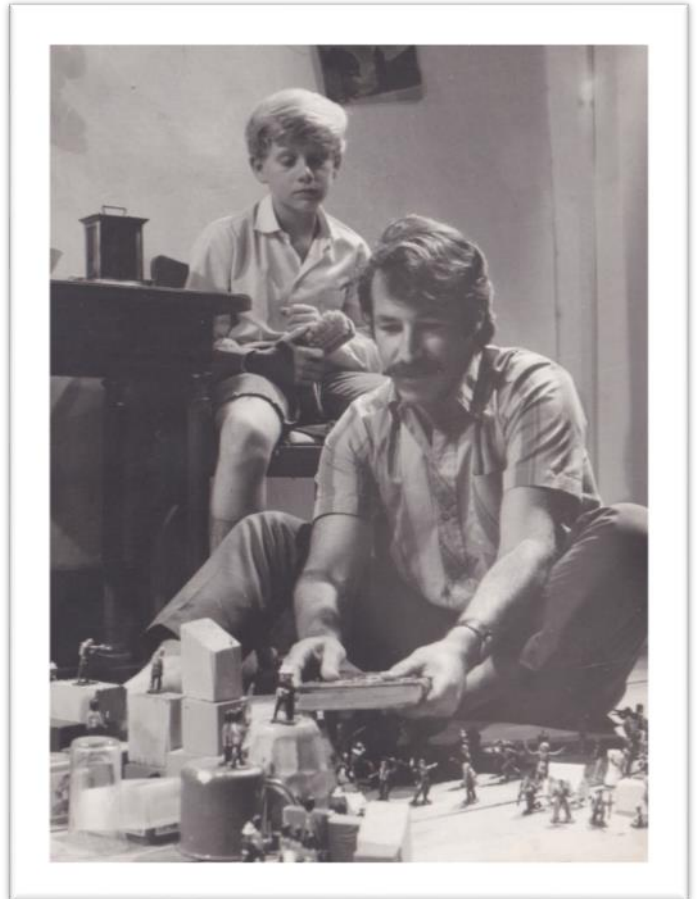


Photo 1. «The great game». I am instructing the two actors how to play the game.

Dear *Mara Piras*, look please the photos enclosed: «The great game» 1, which were taken long time ago during a short film in our (Israeli) TV about one of my stories. You see me (very young), showing two brothers, actors, how we - me and my younger brother - playing our "War Game".



Photo 2. «The great game». The two actors on the screen.

Dear *Francesca Secci*, *Cristian Schiattarella* and *Maria Trebini*,

My answer to *Francesca Secci*, *Cristian Schiattarella* and *Maria Trebini* about my love for the girl Julia:

Your questions:

1. "I was very impressed that you had a girlfriend while you were in the camp of Bergen-Belsen, because I did not think, at that time, that a boy could fall in love during the war".

2. "I know that you were in love during the war. How was it? What was Julia like? Did she have the same feelings? Have you ever kissed? How did you meet her? How long did your love last?"

It was like love in very young age and in a צריף was ביתן full with people. She was seating on her דרגש (beds in 2 floors), netting (usually) something for her father (our camp in Bergen-Belzen was one from only two camps there that were family camps (in Bergen-Belzen). Many times she was wearing a rosy sweate mohair wool. When her father was outside, some times, I dared to put my arm on her shoulder. I never kissed her. She was blond with blue eyes, (like my wife). Our love lasted half a year, till the end of the war. You can see her photo enclose here.



Photo 3. Julia Andrzej

Translated by Mrs Anna Maria Leopaldi

ACTIVITY OF WRITER



1. What is the moment when you really realized to be a "writer"?
(*Elena Scattu*)

When my second book was published.

2. Are you going to write other novels? If yes, can you tell us something about it?
(*Simona Mirai*)

My last novel was published in Italian in 2011. The title of the book: «La ricerca della terra felice»

3. What motivated you to write these stories and to tell about what you experienced?
(*Margherita Ludovico*)

All the artists use many episodes from their childhood, I think because when we are children everything happened to us for the first time and then it is so strong that it stays in our memory and ours feelings. You can think about painters, composers, writers, film makers etc. who use their childhood memories in their art.

I had 3 periods of childhood, one before the war, one in the time of The Second World War, and the third one after the war. You can find something from my childhood also in my picture books for small children, and in all the other.

4. As you read a lot and wrote many poems in Bergen-Belsen, do you think this has given you a starting point for your career as a writer? Can you send to us one of your poems?
(*Matteo Lobina*)

I wrote 15 poems in Bergen-Belsen and I thought then that I will be a poet. But as an adult (23 years old) I started to write prose.

The poems were translated to Italian. The title of the book: Poesie scritte a tredici anni a Bergen-Belsen (1944). Publishing house: Giuntina.

5. What were your feelings when you won the Andersen prize? Who did you dedicate the prize to?

(Sara Vargiu)

I was very happy. I didn't dedicate the prize to any body in particular. But today I think that without my wife, Yaara, to which I am married already 51 years, I would not be as successful in my writing carrier as I did.

6. Did you think you deserved the prize when you won?

(Elena Scattude)

Yes.

7. Would you ever thought to become a famous writer?

(Margherita Ludovico)

No.

8. As a boy you loved adventure books; today what is your favorite novel?

(Matteo Gomiero)

My favorite novels today are still adventure books, but I loved very much books about relations between people, for example in a family, and many other situations, of course if they are exciting and suspenseful.

9. According to you, does the film adaptation from «The Island on Bird Street» reflect the content and the spirit of your novel?

(Mattia Spiga)

The films must be always different then the books. First of all in the books the relationships are describe by words, and in the movies in a visual way and also, in a movie there is a length limit which requires the script writer to use his talent to bring the book in short time.

10. Do you keep in touch with other writers like you who lived through the tragedy of the Holocaust? If so, who are they?

(Francesco Lai)

Not in particular.

11. What, in your opinion, is the novel that best represents yourself?

(Illona Diversy)

All of them represent my life and personality.

12. Which novel do you recommend us about the Holocaust?

(Edera Rubiu)

The island on bird street.

13. Is there anything you wrote which you repented? And what you did not write but you would like to write?

(Elena Scattu)

I have no regrets what so ever about my writing.

14. When you are writing, do you have a favorite place that inspires you the most?

(Margherita Ludovico)

Yes, our very small and dark bad room.

15. Did you have crisis moments as a writer?

(Elena Scattu)

Usually I don't have crisis moments, because I sit to write only after I thought few months about the idea of the book and I sit to write only when the story is ready in my heart and in my feelings.

16. What are, in your opinion, the ingredients to make a compelling story?

(Immacolata Melis)

I have no answer to this question since I am not teaching people how to write.

17. Does writing mean freedom for you?

(Simona Mirai)

Writing makes me happy because all the events that the hero in the story goes through, are happening to me while writing it. I was always looking for adventures and when you are dreaming about them nothing really dangerous happens to you. Writing for me it is a sort of day dreaming.

18. Is there anything you could not write because too "strong" emotionally?

(Elena Scattu)

«Too strong emotionally» is a very subjective notion so I don't have a real answer to this question.

19. What is the most effective method, in addition to writing, to talk about the Holocaust?

(Francesco Porrà)

I can't give a prescription to any body. Every artist - a painter, a sculptor, a musician, a film maker etc. - can use his art to deal with the subject of Holocaust, or as you have put it: "to talk about the Holocaust".

20. Do you gain a lot of money as a writer?

(Ilaria Carracoi)

There are writers whose books are best sellers all over the world, and they can become very wealthy. As to myself, I can make a fair living as a writer.

21. How do you organize your daily routine as a writer?

(Mattia Aversano)

Usually, when I was writing, I do it afternoon and in the evening.

22. Which novel, written by another author, would you like have written?

(Francesco Ladu)

There is a beautiful book written and illustrated by a Polish writer (a lady) named Iwona Chmielewska: "IL DIARIO DI BLUMKA". It is a story about a 10 years old girl, a fictive figure who lives in the orphanage of Dr. Janusz Korczak. Except for the fictive hero, all the details of the daily life are exactly like it is written in many volumes of his pedagogical writings. I translated his writing from Polish to Hebrew.

23. What is the worst literary criticism that you received? And the best one?

(Illona Diversy)

I am lucky to get mostly good reviews for my writing.

24. How long will it take to write a novel?

(Margherita Ludovico and Francesco Lai)

Usually it takes me a few months after a long period of time in which I live with the idea.

25. What is the time of day in which you concentrate better to write?

(Sara Vargiu)

After noon.

26. How many hours a day do you write?

(Elia Randazzo)

When I was writing - and I am not writing all the time - I did it in a way that did not disturb the daily life of the family.

27. Can you give us some advice to write a short story in the classroom?

(Sara Vargiu)

The only advice that I can give you is to write.

28. Have you ever thought that being a writer was a useless thing?

(Ilona Diversy)

Of course not, all along the human history people loved to listen to, and to read stories and fairy tales. Writing was always a respectful profession.

29. In your opinion, what is the main purpose of a writer?

(Elena Scattu)

Writers have different purposes to write. Many of them feel that they can't do anything but writing. It is an urge in them.

30. When, in your opinion, a book is useful?

(Valentina Pietrantonio)

There are many «useful» books: For example «How to make money», «How to educate children», «How to find happiness in life» or «How to clean silver».

But for me the most useful books are those which touch my heart, those with whose heroes I identify. These are the books that enrich my life.

31. Do you have a precise idea when you start writing? How do you go on?

(Alessia Fasciana)

When I have a clear idea for a story, the story "pushes" me to start and go on.

32. Just like Alex, do you believe you are born under a lucky star?

(Francesco Porrà)

Yes, I can believe this. In my personal history I can find many reasons to do so.

Translated by Mrs Anna Maria Leopardi

We received the responses to the questions on the activity of Uri Orlev as a writer: write a brief reflection about the answer that hit you the most.

Tortoli, March 31th 2015

The answer that made me think is that in which Uri Orlev spoke of the usefulness of books. I really agree with his answer.

(Lorenzo Marcialis)

Among the answers he gave to us, what hit me most was the one where he talked about the usefulness of the books. And I agree with his statement. One of the books I have read recently that most impressed me is entitled «Red Bracelets». It is the story of young cancer patients, who struggle every day and transmit the hope of living and, above all, is a novel that talks about friendship as something that helps to overcome the diseases.

(Maribel Canu)

I agree that reading is a useful thing, because it stimulates the imagination, you learn new words, which are very helpful at school. But reading is also useful to relax. I really liked the reading of the story «Lucky and Zorba», a beautiful story of friendship between two animals.

(Davide Secci)

I loved the answers regarding the usefulness of the books and writing. They are both personal enrichment activities and relief. In fact, reading is like to imagine in reality what the book says. A book allows you to imagine and dream. Reading, for me, is a beautiful thing, as you said, an important point of reference. This happens when the novel touches your heart, if it makes you feel deep emotions. And the great thing is that you can re-read the book many times as you want. There is a book that I was very impressed by, entitled «The Fault in Our Stars». I liked it because it has a deep message and transmits the hope of recovery despite a serious illness. *(Chiara Solanas)*

Writing is very touching: it is true. When I am reading, then, I feel unique sensations. Writing is «flying» and «travel» with fantasy. It makes us empathize with the characters. It makes us cry or smile like them, as if we were living the same things. In the novel, you can find things that, sometimes, you do not have the courage to say. It makes us dream of the characters that we want to be.

(Maria Trebini)

I agree with your answer on writing. In fact, when you are writing the imagination unfolds, but it's also nice when you write about something that happened to you, and your memories come back to mind.

(Francesco Ladu)

Uri Orlev in his last letter told us of his life as a writer. I liked his words about the high value of the books, even of his episodes from his childhood. With a few words, he perfectly describes places, people, emotions and brutal facts. I think Mr Orlev's novels are very useful, as are those called "How to educate children" or "How to clean silver".

In my opinion, the writer is certainly right and I think all the books can be helpful to learn history or for education.

(Margherita Ludovico)

I liked the writer's answer to Simona's question about the importance of writing. When he says that writing makes him feel good, I think that this statement is true for many people. Many people like to write, but in some countries, the writers often cannot express their thoughts freely because it's dangerous. I think this is something really unfair.

Now, imagine a world where everyone can write everything and make everybody know their thoughts. Wouldn't it be a better and freer world? Unfortunately, this is not the reality.

(Francesco Porrà)

Translation by Mrs Anna Maria Leopardi

THE SHOAH



1. Dear Uri Orlev, what were the thoughts, fears, moods when you were deported to the concentration camp?

(Davide Secci)

The situation was very different from you imagine to be.



2. In the novel, you speak of "selection". It is a bad word. Where and how did you experience that? Tells us something?

(Edera Rubiu)

In the time of the extermination of the population in Warsaw Ghetto (22 July 1942 - April 1943) many people tried to find a place in some factories that worked for the German army. "Selecion" is a term which was used by the Germans when they wanted to take people out and send them to death camps. (Older people and women with children). Please read in my book: «Soldatini di piombo».

3. What are your feelings or emotions when you remember the Holocaust?

(Francesco Ladu)

I can think, write or talk about it only as I remember it as a child.

4. During your stay in the ghetto, have you ever thought of not having a future?

(Illona Diversy)

No, never.

5. How did you feel, when your father was captured by the Russians?

(Elia Randazzo)

My father was an officer in the Polish army (medical doctor.) He was a war prisoner.

6. In the prison camp of Bergen-Belsen, which were the strongest emotions that you felt?

(Margherita Ludovico)

We were there for 2 years. After 3 months we started to be hungry.

7. Do you have the number tattooed on your arm? If yes, can you tell us what it is? How did you feel then?

(Francesco Lai)

No. Bergen-Belsen was a "city" of many camps. Our camp was a family camp. Not a forced-labor camp. People were not marked with numbers.

8. When you have been deported, what was your biggest fear? And now what scares you?

(Francesco Porrà)

Please read in my book: «Soldatini di piombo», chapter 15.

9. How did you spend your days in Bergen-Belsen camp? Did you have any friends?

(Cristian Schiattarella)

Yes, I had friends of my age and in the last year I fell in love with a girl, Julia. I have sent you her photo in one of my e-mails.

10. I'm very interested to know what life was like in the concentration camp. Can you tell us something about it?

(Matteo Lobina)

Please read in my book: «Soldatini di piombo», chapter 16 - 20.

11. Has it been a difficult period without your parents?

(Eugenio Murru)

We were with our aunt. My mother was killed in January 18 1943 and our father was a war prisoner in Russia. He came back to Poland in 1946. He came to Israel in 1954.

12. What did you remember best of the concentration camp?

(Margherita Ludovico)

When some people came to my aunt to congratulate her after I read aloud one of my poems which I wrote in the barrack.

13. What was the worst day and risky in the field?

(Matteo Lobina)

Each time when the Germans took eople from our camp and sent them - to day we now that it was to Auschwitz. In the beginning we were 3000. In the end we were 350.

14. What did you eat in the concentration camp?

(Nicola Serra)

After the first 3 months we had less and less food.

15. How was the journey that brought you to Palestine? Can you tell us a significant episode of that trip?

(Alessia Fasciana)

The first part of the journey was wiht our Ant. She waked us up when we passed slowly slowly in a train on a bridge and told us "look look! We saw destroyed fabrics in a light of fool moon.

16. Were you deported inside the train wagons? How was the journey and what did you think during the travelling?

(Elena Scattu)

Our Aunt sent us alone to Palestine. I was very happy. I was teenager. I was happy to leave her and all the orders she was giving me all the time. To do this..., to do that... My brother was very sad and he cried. She was like a mother to him.

17. Trudi Birger in her novel says that one of the noises that haunted her was the big speaker. For you, what is the noisiest thing that you still remember?

(Elena Scattu)

No.

18. Did you forgive those who hurt you? Why?

(Sissi Greco)

No, never. Not to the people who hurt us then. How can I forgive the German soldier that killed our mother?

19. At that time, surely you wondered about what was going on, because you were considered "*different*" and had to put the Star of David. What was your opinion about all that was happening?

(Alessia Fasciana)

My opinion about racism and discrimination is very clear. I hope you know it.

20. Kids usually put aside someone who is different or weak and tease him for his mistakes. What advice would you give to correct this bullying attitude?

(Valentina Pietrantonio)



The teachers and the parents must take care about this phenomena. And you too...

21. Did you have any friends in Bergen Belsen? What did you talk about? Were you afraid to die?

(Mattia Spiga)

Yes, I had friends in Bergen Belsen. In the last year there I loved a girl. You can see her photo in one of my e-mails I sent you.

Yes, but I did not believe it will really happen.

We were talking about every thing that youngsters talk, but especially about the war. We wondered when will the war end, and whether we will still be alive - for example in the year 1950.

22. Have you ever thought of escape from the camp?

(Francesco Ladu, Francesco Lai and Francesco Porrà)

Of course not.

23. What are your thoughts about the recent events of racism against the Jews in France and the Netherlands?

(Margherita Ludovico)

I hope you think about it like me.

24. What was the thing that you missed more during the war?

(Simona Mirai)

To walk through fields and to go and go to the horizon...

25. What is, in your opinion, the best way to prevent a horror like the Holocaust?

(All the students)

We, simple citizens, can only choose the right party in the elections. But if one day you will be a strong politician don't forget this question.

26. In your opinion, what place should we visit, what movie should we see and what novel or poetry should we read to understand really the Shoah?

(All the students)

You have to consult with your teachers who will help you to find in the internet, books and movies. I personally recommend to read and learn about the history and culture of the Jewish people who lived in Europe before the war. You can start with Italy. Only this way you can understand the depth and size of the loss.

Translated by Anna Maria Leopaldi and Mrs Antonia Ladu

Designed and developed by Mrs Patrizia Vargiu and Mrs Maria Luisa Usai

