

Confronting The Past

In his wildest dreams, author Lev Raphael never thought he'd travel to the country he blamed for his family's pain.

Suzanne Chessler
Special to the Jewish News

Lev Raphael's 19th book, intended to memorialize his mother, turned out to focus on his own life-altering experiences.

Raphael, whose parents were Holocaust survivors, grew up hating the Germany discussed by one or the other but more often kept secret by them.

Although the author thought he never could have positive feelings about anything representing the country that caused so much pain, his outlook changed during book-signing tours arranged by the German publisher of his previous books and recalled in his latest, *My Germany: A Jewish Writer Returns to the World His Parents Escaped* (Terrace Books; \$26.95).

"There were things I discovered that were surprising and wonderful, not least of all the fact that I could have a good time in Germany," says Raphael, 54, who will read from his book 1 p.m. Sunday, April 26, at Congregation Shaarey Zedek in East Lansing.

"When I talked to Germans whose parents were perpetrators, they told of also growing up with silence and

secrets but obviously of a very different kind."

Raphael, raised in New York and relocated to accept a teaching position at Michigan State University, has been writing nonfiction and fiction about children of Holocaust survivors for three decades. His first article with a Jewish theme appeared in the *Detroit Jewish News*.

"*My Germany* is a memoir, travelogue, account of European Jewish history and commentary on contemporary Germany," says Raphael, whose previous books include *The German Money*, *Writing a Jewish Life* and *Dancing on Tisha B'Av*.

"This nonfiction work really is the capstone to everything I've been doing. It addresses the past, present and future."

Raphael, brought up without much religious observance, recalls how he found Jewish identity on his own, changed his first name to reflect his commitment and is now a member of Congregation Shir Tikvah in Troy.

He also discusses, in a separate identity realization, coming out as a gay man and establishing a life with his partner, Gershen Kaufman.

As Raphael approached the book, he tried to learn about the parts of his

mother's life she never revealed. He interviewed many people and searched archival materials.

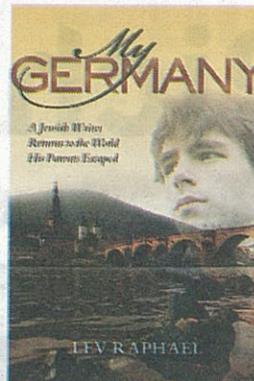
There were many questions surrounding her name, different from the one on Holocaust records.

"The book in some ways became a mystery hunt as I tried to piece together what my parents' lives were before, during and just after the war," Raphael says. "As a mystery author, I found myself pursuing clues all over the country and all over the world. I'm a pretty dogged investigator because I've also written seven mysteries."

Raphael gave up teaching in 1988 to become a full-time writer.

"Many years ago, I never thought I'd be able to watch German movies, but I do that all the time now," Raphael says. "I'm actually taking a German class." □

Lev Raphael will do a reading from *My Germany* 1 p.m. Sunday, April 26, at Congregation Shaarey Zedek, 1924 Coolidge Road, in East Lansing. (517) 351-3570.



My Germany is "a memoir, travelogue, account of European Jewish history and commentary on contemporary Germany."



Lev Raphael: The barriers came tumbling down.

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Jews

Nate Bloom
Special to the Jewish News

TV Premieres
Parks and Recreation, a new sitcom starring Amy Poehler of *Saturday*

to beautify her town. Knope has an ally in local nurse Ann Logan, played by **Rashida Jones**, 33, recently seen on the big screen as **Paul Rudd's** love interest in *I Love You, Man*.

cally linked with actress Lindsay Lohan, although the couple reportedly recently broke up.

Also premiering last week was the police series *The Unusuals*, which airs 10 p.m. Wednesdays

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