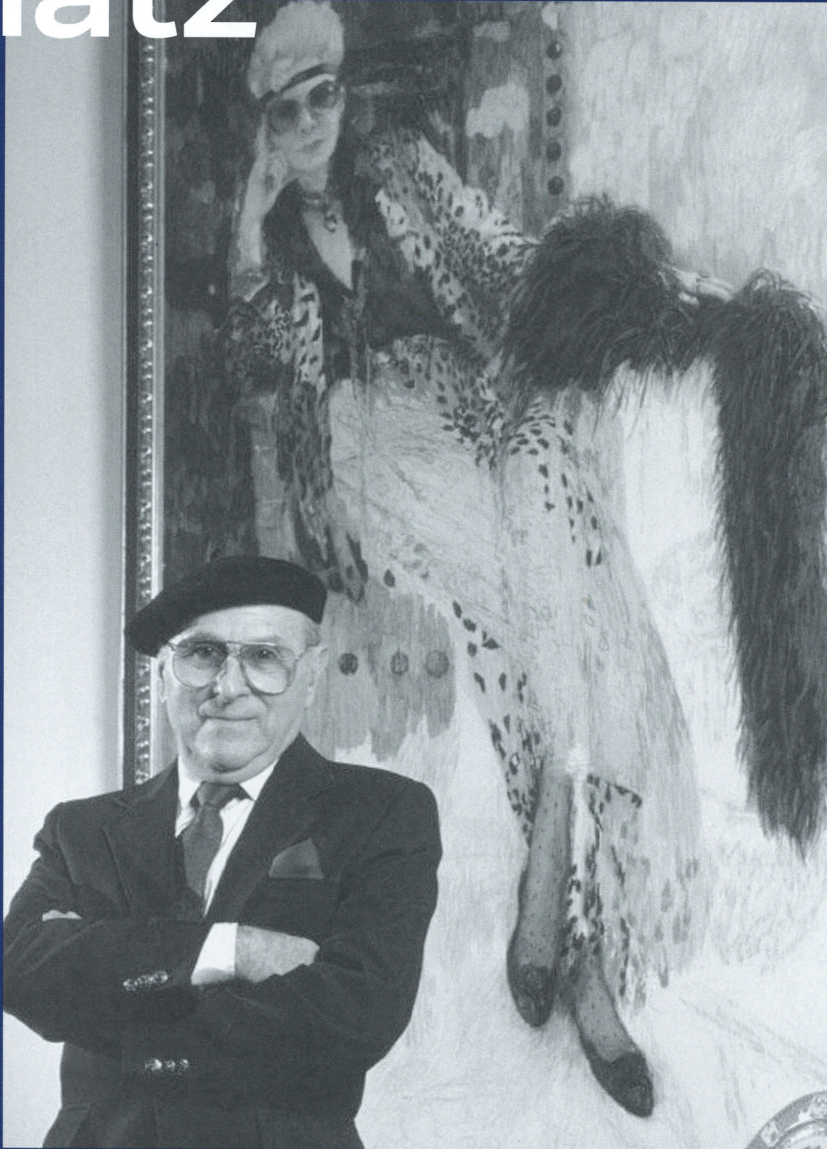


Frank Shatz

Frank Shatz, courtesy of the College of William & Mary.



Fighting Fascism with World Peace

by William T. Walker

In 1944, Frank Shatz undertook an unusual assignment. It seemed simple enough: he was to deliver a heavy suitcase to a luxurious villa in Budapest, Hungary.

Frank soon learned, however, that the suitcase contained gold, and its recipient was none other than Nazi SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann, who was organizing the deportation of Jews to death camps.

In a role worthy of Oskar Schindler, Frank was delivering part of a \$1 million ransom so that the Nazis would permit 3,000 Hungarian Jews to go to Switzerland, rather than to Auschwitz.

Frank plays down the danger of his mission. He recalls arriving at the villa, catching a glimpse of the cadaverous Eichmann, being relieved of the suitcase, and then going on his way.

But the mission was far from simple – or safe. Frank, himself a Jew, had just escaped from a Nazi slave-labor group. Fascist thugs roamed the streets hunting Jews, and Allied bombers regularly dropped heavy loads of munitions on Budapest. Despite the danger, Frank took the risk to help save Jews from the gas chambers.

In many ways, the act began a life-long pattern for the remarkable Holocaust survivor. Despite years of hardship – or perhaps, because of them – Frank Shatz developed a strong commitment to good deeds. One of the primary beneficiaries of Frank’s commitment was the College of William & Mary.

“To my mind,” he said, “a world view based on solid knowledge is the best safeguard against the dangers of revisiting the horrors of the past.”

>> From Slave Labor to Underground.

As a Jewish resident of Central Europe in the 20th century, Frank was well acquainted with horror. A native of Parkan, Czechoslovakia (now Štúrovo, Slovakia), he learned of the Nazi threat when refugees from Germany began to come through the town. But he thought he was protected by his father’s status as a World War I national hero.

This chimera of protection evaporated in 1944, when Frank and other young Jews



Adolf Eichmann listens to the proceedings through a glass booth during his trial in Jerusalem. Photo with permission of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eli M. Rosenbaum.

were sent to Romania as slave-laborers to help build a railroad line over the rugged Carpathian Mountains.

“We were treated just like animals. If we dropped a rail and crushed another worker’s leg, the Nazis would shoot him. He no longer had value to them,” Frank said. “All we had to eat was thin soup and a few kilos of bread.”

Later that year, the Soviets began to push the Nazis and their work crews back toward Budapest. One day, as Allied bombers flew overhead, the laborers were ordered to hide in a cornfield. Frank

escaped and made his way to Budapest.

“I had very little chance of surviving,” he recalled. “I had no place to stay, no food, no papers. Fascist gangs were questioning suspicious persons. Miraculously, I ran into my brother-in-law, Bela Engel, and he took me to one of the ‘safe houses’ established by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

“A few days later, I joined the Zionist underground and was provided false identity papers.”

Until the Red Army conquered Budapest

in January 1945, Frank was a part of the underground that saved Jewish lives, all while dodging death almost every day. Once he escaped by a hair's breadth when bombs destroyed his apartment only five minutes before he arrived there.

>> Out of the Iron Curtain. After the fighting ended, Frank worked as a

translator for the Soviets, then became a correspondent in Prague. There, two things changed his life. First, he met Jarka, his future wife. Second, he read *The Anatomy of Peace*, a book by Hungarian journalist Emery Reves.

Inspired by Reves' vision of world peace through universal law, Frank believed

that the book could be an antidote to the hatred that was once again welling up, as the Communists installed a system every bit as repressive as that of the Nazis.

Recognizing the warning signs, Frank and Jarka Shatz eventually participated in the anti-Communist underground. After the secret police arrested and



View of wartime Budapest after the American bombing. Photo with permission of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Enrico Mandel-Mantello.

interrogated Frank, the underground told them to leave the country.

In 1954, the couple escaped through the Iron Curtain to the West with only one small piece of hand luggage. In the bag, Jarka had placed *The Anatomy of Peace*.

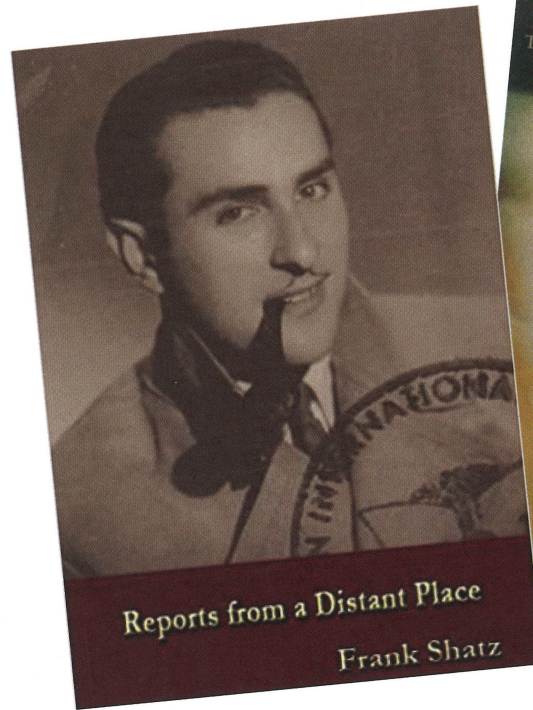
Eventually, the Shatzes immigrated to the United States, where he founded a successful leather company in Lake Placid, NY.

>> A Plan for Peace. On his first return trip to Europe, Frank decided to pay his respects to the man who had so profoundly influenced him with his plan for world peace. Emery Reves agreed to see him for 10 minutes. The visit lasted three hours.

As the relationship grew, Frank began to take steps to advance Reves' vision. When Frank and Jarka bought a home in Williamsburg, Virginia, one opportunity soon appeared.

"Emery Reves had died in 1981, and [his widow] Wendy was determined to create a memorial that would reflect his vision of world peace based on universal law. But she was at a loss to find the right vehicle," Frank recalled. "She wrote us a letter asking for assistance."

"By coincidence, or maybe fate, the very same day her letter arrived, the College of William & Mary announced its intention to establish a world-class center for international studies." Wendy created a \$3 million endowment. Building on her gift, Frank and Jarka established a \$1

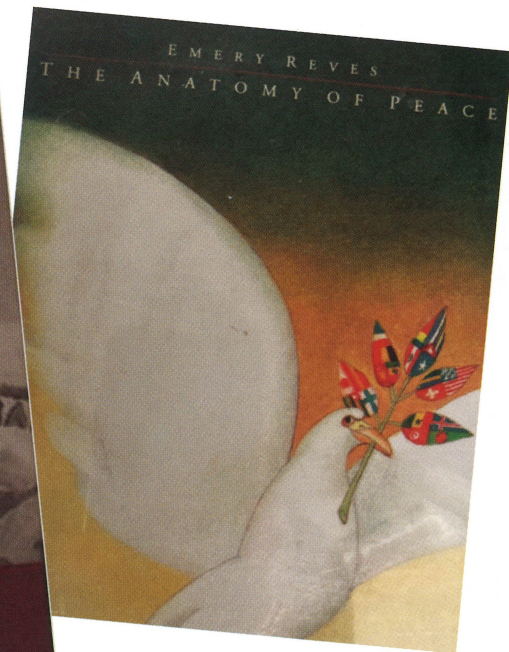


Cover of Shatz's book *Reports From a Distant Place*.

million bequest to fund a diplomat-in-residence.

Frank has also lectured at William & Mary, sharing his wartime experiences with students – an activity he's continued well into his 90s.

"I don't want to talk politics," Frank told the *Virginia Gazette*, but rather, "how I survived and what happened to me. The best investment is to give young people the opportunity to learn, because history and connecting the dots is very important." ♦



The cover of *The Anatomy of Peace* by Emery Reves.

POSTSCRIPT

Frank continues to publish his column with the Virginia Gazette, and remains active while sharing his Holocaust experience and his hopes for peace in the world, even though the increase in autocratic politicians in recent years worries him, including Viktor Orbán of Hungary. The Virginia General Assembly has twice honored Frank for sharing his story of survival and his commitment to education in Virginia.