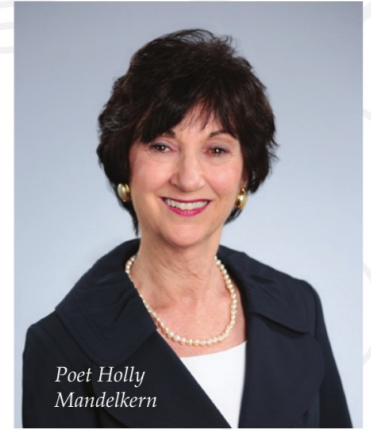


United in Song

by Jill Duff-Hoppes

A local poet and Holocaust educator is turning some of her poignant poetry into songs that celebrate the courage of survivors and victims alike



Poet Holly Mandelkern

For years, Holly Mandelkern has told the compelling stories of Holocaust victims, survivors, rescuers, and resisters through her poetry – which is both heartfelt and heart-wrenching. Now, the award-winning writer is also sharing those stories through the universal language of music.

An accomplished poet, lecturer, and educator, Holly is the author of *Beneath White Stars: Holocaust Profiles in Poetry*. Published in 2017, the book is a collection of more than 40 of Holly's historically accurate, narrative poems, illustrated to great effect by local artist Byron Marshall.

Beginning in 2019 and continuing throughout the pandemic, Holly has been collaborating with about two dozen musicians to turn 17 of the book's poems into songs. *Beneath White Stars: Holocaust Profiles in Song* will be released in late June or early July as a physical CD and a digital download.

"I'm really honored to be able to share, both in poetry and now in song, the complex stories of people who demonstrated so much courage during the Holocaust," says Holly, a 71-year-old resident of Winter Park. "I feel like maybe people who are not as attuned to poetry might be more open to hearing these stories through song, because songs are pretty accessible."

A native of Jacksonville, Holly earned a degree in European history from Vanderbilt University and a graduate degree in library science from Florida State University. In 1991, she traveled to Poland and Israel to study Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and then taught about that very topic for 20 years at the Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida. She also taught Jewish studies at her synagogue, Congregation Ohev Shalom, for two decades.

Holly's interest in studying and teaching the Holocaust stems from her father, Herman Lodinger, who was a lead bombardier with the United States Eighth Air Force during World War II. On his 27th mission, Herman's plane was shot down over Germany. He was captured, held in a prisoner of war work camp with other Allied soldiers, and ultimately sent on a death march

to Austria. Fortunately, he survived the brutal conditions of the forced march, but many of the other soldiers did not.

Holly's book includes a poem about her father's wartime experiences, and it is also dedicated to him. Herman died the same year *Beneath White Stars* was published, but he read his daughter's work before he passed away. The title of Holly's book and album is a nod to a poem by one of her favorite poets, Avrom Sutzkever, which he wrote in the Vilna Ghetto.

Many of the subjects in Holly's book are people she has taught classes about or been privileged enough to meet over the years.

"They've always said the same thing, 'Don't forget about our lives before the war,'" Holly says. "So that is something I really try to address in my poetry and in the songs. Don't just think about these people as a number, a statistic. Think about them as individuals and what each one tried to contribute to the whole."

MUSIC TO HER EARS

As for Holly's album, the project developed in a gradual, organic way. After the release of her book, two music composers told Holly that her poems would lend themselves well to song. The idea intrigued Holly – a lifelong music lover – so she eventually collaborated with Irish singer/songwriter Brendan Nolan to turn a few of the poems into songs.

Their partnership led to collaborations with other musicians, including Ed Krout, the business manager at a production studio in Orlando, where much of the project's recording and mixing was completed. However, some of the musicians live in cities across the United States or in other countries, so their contributions were recorded virtually.

"The album really has become a super-eclectic body of work that spans a lot of different styles," says Ed, who composed music for one of the songs and played piano on the track. "That's kind

The cover for Holly's upcoming album, *Beneath White Stars, Holocaust Profiles in Song*, based on a book of her poems. The cover was designed by Rick Kilby, inspired by an illustration by Byron Marshall.



To learn more about Holly's book and album, visit HollyMandelkern.com or [Facebook.com/HollyMandelkern](https://www.facebook.com/HollyMandelkern).

of the beauty of it, just this cross-cultural, cross-generational collaboration."

For Ed, the project is especially significant because his late father (like Holly's) was a Jewish-American soldier who served in Europe during World War II.

"This is so emotional and meaningful to me," Ed says. "It's been a unique experience and an honor to work on this album."

For Holly, the album has been something of a family affair because her son, Joel, pitched in as a project manager and a composer for six of the songs. Her fervent hope is that the album

will appeal to a broad audience and connect with future generations.

"One of the reasons I produced this album is that I am hoping educators will use these songs when teaching about the Holocaust," Holly says. "Through music, I'm hoping that even more people will hear about the lives of the individuals in my book. I really feel very impassioned to use whatever talent I have to try to keep these stories alive in people's hearts and minds."

This poem, "You Never Saw Another Butterfly," is featured in Holly's book and appears as a song on her upcoming album. The poem pays tribute to Pavel Friedmann, best known for writing the poem "The Butterfly" in the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp and ghetto.

YOU NEVER SAW ANOTHER BUTTERFLY

You tell us of the butterfly whose yellow dazzled you, kissed the ghetto world good-bye—the last bright winged one flew.

The sun's tears like your own fears "sing against a white stone..."
The sun can cry, but you must dry your tears inside a poem.

For seven long weeks you gaze about for signs of what's still living: dandelions, white chestnut branch, your reasons for thanksgiving.

You miss the flight of butterflies—"O happy living things."[†]
We mourn your own departure there, a poet without wings.

[†]Pavel Friedmann, "The Butterfly."

[†]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

FOCUS ON

Abby Nelson's Great Homes Group

by Emily Rajj

One year ago, the team at Abby Nelson's Great Homes Group could not have predicted how much the pandemic would impact business. But like many others, they have found ways to continue serving their clients safely and successfully.

"A lot of the adaptations that we've done are probably going to be things we'll keep doing moving forward," says Dannielle Southon, marketing coordinator.

Those adaptations include using social media and more online listings to spread the word about available homes, which are selling quickly. Everyone who lists with Abby Nelson's Great Homes Group also receives a bag filled with hand sanitizer, gloves, food covers, disinfectant, wipes, and masks to keep clients and the community safe.

"Business as unusual has shifted to business as usual," explains Dannielle, who notes the team quickly got used to doing everything online, from paper forms to online presentations. They have been busier than ever this year, and the market isn't showing any signs of slowing down. "We've all become those chameleons of real estate."

As a result, clients get the benefit of faster response times and the ability to do everything from the comfort of home.

Abby might be a chameleon of real estate, but one thing that hasn't changed is her commitment to community, whether she's recommending local small businesses to clients or supporting the Jewish Federation's Bornstein Leadership Development Program and RAISE (Recognizing Abilities & Inclusion of Special Employees).

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