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**HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE: The Unlikely
Journey of a Voluntary Jew from Nazi
Persecution to the American Dream**

By Georgette F. Bennett

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IDENTITY, SURVIVAL, AND THE TWISTS OF FATE

**In HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE, Georgette Bennett Tells the Extraordinary Story
of a Holocaust Survivor Whose Life in America Intertwined with Her Own**

“He was only my third cousin-in-law but my closest extended family.” With these words, award-winning author and humanitarian Georgette Bennett introduces Gerd “Pips” Phillipsohn, the man at the heart of her new book, **HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE: The Unlikely Journey of a Voluntary Jew from Nazi Persecution to the American Dream** (Heresy Press, January 27, 2026). “Pips and his wife, Olga, were at the pier to meet me and my parents when we arrived in New York in 1952 as stateless refugees,” Bennett writes. “We remained close for the rest of their lives.”

HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE is both a deeply personal work and a gripping Holocaust survival story. Born in Berlin in 1922 to a Jewish father and Lutheran mother, Pips was legally classified as a *Mischling* (half-Jew) under Nazi law. This status could have given him a measure of protection. Instead, at age 13, Pips voluntarily chose to have a bar mitzvah in September 1935 — the very week the Nuremberg Laws went into effect. That decision marked him as fully Jewish and set him on a path of extraordinary peril.

For the next decade, Pips lived on the knife’s edge of survival. He spent the war years hiding in Berlin itself, the “belly of the Nazi beast.” He was arrested and imprisoned four times by the Gestapo, escaped three times, and narrowly escaped deportation to

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Auschwitz when a Nazi secretary “lost” his file — an act of quiet resistance that may have saved his life. Pips survived through a mix of ingenuity, irreverence, and sheer luck. He charmed some, bluffed others, and often joked, even when the stakes were life and death.

After the war, in a Displaced Persons camp, Pips met Olga Horvath, who had survived Auschwitz. Their marriage joined two different survival stories — his through hiding and quick wit, hers through endurance in the camps. Together they emigrated to America, where they built a new life from scratch.

In the United States, Pips’ story became as improbable as his wartime survival. He worked as a waiter and bicycle messenger before co-owning Globe Photos, which became the largest photo agency in the world. Though he never owned a camera, his business brought him into contact with Hollywood stars, publishing titans, and cultural icons — and even landed him in a Playboy photo layout in which he posed, fully dressed, flanked by a cluster of nude women. He and Olga became known as a “golden couple,” living stylishly and socializing widely during what Bennett calls their “glamour years.”

But beneath the elegance lingered trauma. Olga, despite her grace and strength, carried the scars of Auschwitz for the rest of her life. In time, the weight became unbearable, and she jumped to her death from the roof of their luxe Manhattan apartment tower. Pips went on, continuing to struggle with survivor guilt and wrestling with questions of identity — German, Jew, American. He often joked, “Hitler made me a Jew.” Through it all, humor and resilience defined him. Even in his final days, he still flirted with nurses and refused life-prolonging measures that would silence him, because life without talking was no life at all, according to Pips.

For Bennett, **HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE** is a personal tribute and a moral imperative. “Writing this book continues my lifelong work of confronting prejudice, preserving memory, and highlighting the resilience of the human spirit. As witnesses to the Holocaust pass away and denial grows, it is more urgent than ever to keep these stories alive,” she explains. It is also a cautionary tale for our own age.

At its essence, **HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE** is a meditation on choice, courage, and the absurdities of fate. It asks readers to confront history not as abstraction, but as lived experience — embodied by one unforgettable man who embraced his Jewish identity even when it put him most at risk.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Georgette F. Bennett, author of **HALF-JEW – FULL LIFE**, is an award-winning sociologist, widely published author, popular lecturer, and former NBC News correspondent. She founded the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in 1992 and the Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees in 2013, which has mobilized more than \$660 million in humanitarian aid for Syria, Gaza, and other conflict zones. She co-founded Global Covenant Partners and served on the U.S. State Department's Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group. She has published three previous books, ***Religicide, Thou Shalt Not Stand Idly By***, and ***Crime Warps***, and more than eighty articles, manuals, and textbooks. In 2019, Bennett received the AARP Purpose Prize, and in 2021 was named to *Forbes'* list of 50 Over 50 Women of Impact. You can learn more at www.bennettny.com.