Lev Raphael is standing in the doorway of his home, holding back one of his West Highland Terriers. Promptly he is in the kitchen, using his Braun coffee maker, an emblem of a fear of all things German his new book, "My Germany," has helped him to overcome.

For nearly two decades, Lev Raphael has mined the landscape of his youth as a "second generation" of Holocaust survivors. But in his newly released My Germany, the focus of his work turns towards understand, truth and history.

"My Germany," Raphael's recently released memoir, explores not only the war time experiences of his parents, the hiding from Nazis and the interment in various concentration camps, but also the fragile topography of hate and fear growing up in the silenced shadows of the Holocaust imprinted on his own psyche.

It is not his first stab at writing, nor at covering the subject of his heritage. Previous works from the gay, East Lansing-based author include non-fiction works "Stick Up For Yourself!" and "The German Money." He's also the author of a series of mystery novels, including "The Edith Wharton Murders" and "Tropic of Murder."

But for now, his focus is his past and the experiences of his parents.

Raphael talks at length in "My Germany" about the taboo that all things German were in his childhood, and how that has impacted him since. He notes an unwillingness to have German-made products - from cars to coffee grinders - in his own home. He also talks about an abiding disgust of Germany itself; a fear that if he were called there he would face the Nazis again, as his family did.

The book charts his course, when, after his mother's death, he decided to find out more about his mother during the war. Raphael followed her footsteps through Germany, visiting some of the places where she once walked. He did the same with his father. And through it all, he challenged his own assumptions about the German people. He calls the book a coming of age story.

"This is a very baby boomer book," he said, laughing. "Looking back at your past while you're look ahead to the future of your children or your children's children if they have them. Its kind of a historical assessment."

Beyond assessment, it is a reclamation of things past. Things hidden, and buried. Things placed in the context in which they belong.

In Raphael's words: "I feel like I got pieces of the past back."

<HEADER Finding the past>
According to Raphael, there are obvious parallels between the children of Holocaust victims and survivors and the LGBT community. Particularly, the process many in the gay community undergo in a search for history in the past, and in the present.

"It still amazes me all this stuff is so taboo and kept from us," he said. "We're all looking for a foundation on which to build real pride as opposed to defensiveness."

Raphael related the story of watching people visiting the traveling exhibit from the United State Holocaust Museum about the Holocaust and the gays. Everyone who came, gay or straight, said the same thing: "I didn't know that."

He attributes part of this lack of history and connection to society in general, but he also blames gay culture to an extent. He cited one gay magazine as being about the clubs. And then he noted that fixation on the "now" of our modern media is also an American context.

He also noted that the AIDS epidemic has added to this, created what he called a "ditch between us and our past," because so many writers, who held the stories of our pasts, were killed in the epidemic's early years.

In a sense, Raphael sees survivors of the AIDS epidemic from the '80s and '90s as Holocaust survivors of the gay community. "I think they are shell shocked," he said. "To speak about it is to relive it."

The advent of the cocktails - a powerful combination of antiretrovirals which seem to keep HIV in check - in the 1990s also added to the issue. Raphael noted that for many, the perception is the crisis is over - you just take a pill and move on. "Let's move on to something else," he explained of the current attitude.

<HATER The spectre of hate past and present>

Hate, obviously a heavy factor in "My Germany," also plays a part in the hate crimes committed against the LGBT community today. Raphael, of course, is keenly aware of that fact.

A Lansing resident for some time, Raphael admits that he knows of Young Americans for Freedom, a student group at Michigan State University that has been on the list of the Southern Poverty Law Center surveillance of hate groups since 2007. "I've followed it and I have been horrified," he said.

He noted YAF was not the first time MSU was unable to understand how it was sanctioning hate action. He talked at length about a visit by Louis Farrakhan to the East Lansing campus, and how university officials could not understand how this was offensive to Jewish members of the community.

But Raphael said he is disappointed by the lackluster response to hate rhetoric spewed by groups like YAF by student organizers. He talked about an incident at Smith College where protestors shut down a controversial speaker by banging pots and pans - a tactic similar to screaming and protesting at Michigan State University at various Young Americans for Freedom events.

Raphael said those types of demonstrations are often trumpeted by blogs and LGBT leaders. But his attitude is the opposite.

"I had a contrary reaction," he said. "I said,'How is that different than skinheads busting up a talk or stopping some one from talking?' The thing is not to mimic who you hate, but to create an alliance on
campus and demonstrate and do counter programming and do everything possible. I don't know how successful that was at Michigan State."

While the rise of hate activity in the U.S. has been correlated with economic declines, Raphael said he hopes this economic crisis will be different. He said people are angry, but they are not sure which group to target their anger at. He said people seem to be still stunned by the speed and depth of the economic crisis and that they know they can't direct their hatred at President Obama because he is black. So they are still searching, looking for the scapegoat.

As for the Obama's actions regarding LGBT issues, Raphael is patient. He urges that more than two months are needed to see real change in that sector.

"My guess is that our issues are important to him but I also think things are probably much worse than we realize," he said. He imagines the looming economic meltdown probably has created a "sense of real panic and disaster in the White House."

But he is willing to let the President address the large economic crisis before turning his attention to the gay community. And he sees there will be a time for the community.

Until then, Raphael is enjoying the liberation knowledge can bring. A knowledge of the past, a knowledge of self and a knowledge of a once mythic land of evil which he has stood and confronted, finding instead a country as confused and lost as he once was.