

Sources Materials – Resistance Session 2

from the Oneg Shabbat Archives on the Warsaw Ghetto

From “Who Will Write Our History”

by Samuel D. Kassow

What would you do?

When the uprising broke out on April 19 Winter joined his surviving children in a well-equipped bunker under Franciszkanska 30. After some persuasion, a proud Abraham Gepner also joined them. Israel Gutman recalled that, in the first few days of the battle of the ghetto, as the buildings aboveground went up in smoke and the air inside the bunker turned acrid and it was difficult to breathe, Winter sat in a corner and wrote in his diary. After Gutman was wounded in the eye, Winter came to visit him, and it would be their last meeting. For the first time Winter spoke to the young Gutman as a...

His life was finished, the older man told him, and besides, after the lo...

wife and son, he was a broken man. But one question bothered him a...

him no rest: Where was the outside world as the Jews went to their deaths?

They, the Jews abroad and the world in general know what [is happening here]. We hear the radio station Swit boast about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. So if they know, what are they doing, how are they reacting? Do they just get out of bed, read the newspapers, drink their morning coffee, and complain about the bad weather? Does nothing bother them? Does not one bit of our pain reach them?... [Winter] wanted to ask Jews after the war, what did they do?⁵¹ (pp 158-159)

Youth Movements

As Israel Gutman and others have pointed out, the youth movements out for their inner cohesion and their ability to maintain intellectual and moral standards in the chaotic and demoralizing conditions of the ghetto. The members, having known one another long before the war began, trusted and relied on one another.

Abraham Lewin

Can Informers be Killed?

The Talmud permits the killing of informers, and that is also the opinion of the Shulkhan Arukh. In the Responsa of Reb Asher b. Jehiel, it is mentioned that Reb Asher ordered an informer's tongue cut off to prevent him from continuing his murderous activity. In the response of Reb Meir of Lublin the fact is noted that, in the days of R. Shachna of Lublin Jewish informers were drowned in the *mikveh* [ritual bath] But today 'there aren't enough *mikvehs* to suffice for all the Jewish informers.⁸⁵ (Pp 167-168) Rabbi Shimon Huberband (1909-1942) "The Extortion of Money from Jews by Jews."

Concerning German massacres in the provinces. (Pages 171-172)

An unremitting insecurity, a never-ending fear, is the most terrible aspect of all our tragic and bitter experiences. If we ever live to see the end of this cruel war and are able as free people and citizens to look back on the war years that we have lived through, then we will surely conclude that the most terrible and unholy, the most destructive aspect for our nervous system and our health was to live night and day in an atmosphere of unending fear and terror for our physical survival, in a continual wavering between life and death—a state where every passing minute brought with it the danger that our hearts would literally burst with fear and dread. (p. 171)

Seeing his family dragged off to the cattle cars.. August 12, 1942

Eclipse of the sun, universal blackness. My Luba was taken away during a blockade on 30 Gesia Street. There is still a glimmer of hope in front of me. Perhaps she will be saved. And, if God forbid she is not? My journey to the Umschlagplatz—the appearance of the streets—fills me with dread. To my anguish there was no prospect of rescuing her. It looks like she was taken directly to the train. . . I have no words to describe my desolation. I ought to go after her, to die. But I have no strength to take such a step. Ora—her calamity. A child who was so tied to her mother, and how she loved her. (pp. 153—154)

To be remembered as a martyr.

How terrible it is that a whole generation—millions of Jews—has suddenly become a community of martyrs, who have had to die in such a cruel, degrading and painful manner and go through the torments of hell before going to the gallows. Earth, earth do not cover our blood and do not keep silent, so that our blood will cry out until the ends of time and demand revenge for this crime that has no parallel in our history and in the whole of human history. (pp. 206-207)

If Polish Jewry went under, what would happen to the Jewish people?

Warsaw was in fact the backbone of Polish Jewry, its heart, one could say. The destruction of Warsaw would have meant the destruction of the whole of Polish Jewry, even if the provinces had been spared this evil. Now that the enemy's sword of destruction has run amok through the small towns and villages and is cutting them down with murderous blows—with the death agony of the metropolis, the entire body is dying and plunging into hell. One can say that with the setting of the sun of Polish Jewry the splendor and the glory of world Jewry has vanished. We, the Polish Jews, were after all the most vibrant nerve of our people. (p. 232)

Child Smugglers (p 182) - Henryka Lazowert - "To the Child Smuggler,"

Through walls, through holes, over ruins, through barbed wire I'll still find a way. Hungry, thirsty and barefoot I slither through like a snake: by day, at night, at dawn. No matter how hot. No matter how much rain. You can begrudge me my profit. I am risking my little neck.¹³⁰

Gustawa Jarecka - "The Last Stage of Deportation Is Death." (pp 183-184)

"Memories of mothers crazed with pain over losing their children; the memory of the cries of little children carried away without overcoats, in summer clothes and barefooted, going on the road to death and crying with innocent tears, not grasping the horror of what was happening to them, the memory of the despair of old fathers and mothers, abandoned to their fate by their adult children, and the memory of that stony silence hanging over the dead city after the sentence, passed upon 300,000 persons, had been carried out.¹³⁵ "

Why, she asked, did the Jewish masses not resist? She admitted that the Germans found it easy to fool the Jews and that Jewish solidarity quickly collapsed as individuals looked for ways to save themselves through “exemptions.” But she implied that no one could afford to ignore another factor, and that was the Jews’ misplaced optimism in mankind. They simply refused to believe that mass extermination was possible. They continued to accept the assumption that “organized communities had a right to life.... Warily and slowly most of us, who had been brought up on illusions, learned to consider facts from the viewpoint of subordinating justice to politics. Too long we had believed in the importance of life.”

Peretz Opoczynski (p189 -192) - ‘In “Children on the Pavement”

Opoczynski poured out his outrage at his fellow Jews for allowing Jewish children to sleep in the streets, starve to death, and degenerate into wizened and decrepit beggars. Like Ringelblum, he was especially bitter at the Judenrat and the Jewish police for sending only poor Jews to labor camps, a policy that exposed the children of the poor to particular hardship. But not just the Judenrat and the Jewish police were to blame. The plight of the Jewish child exposed the moral bankruptcy of much of Jewish society. Yes, the Germans bore ultimate responsibility. But that did not excuse Jews who had lost their sense of community and their feelings of mutual responsibility. The war had made Warsaw Jews—selfish to begin with—even more egotistical and self-absorbed.

“All sense of community began and ended with the four walls of one’s own apartment. It is the tragedy of the Polish Jews that the war found them so unprepared, so unorganized, so unable to rise to the needs of the times. Polish Jewry—divided into thousands of separate tribes [*eydes*— and each person a tribe unto himself.¹⁴⁶”

“[The suffering of the Jewish child] should have shaken us to our core, yanked us out of our passive paralysis and blindness and moved us all to protect our children. But so far that has not happened. As I write these lines [November 1941] we are going through the most critical time of the ghetto new expulsions, more streets being taken away, less room, a tighter noose around our necks, walls, new walls There is no room to move. Winter, damp, cold, poverty and death-will we be able to save the Jewish child?”¹⁴⁸

In the last months of his life, Opoczynski continually returned to the theme of resistance. Apparently unaware of the ZOB and its preparations for armed resistance, he gave vent to his anger in his diary. On December 4, 1942, he discounted a rumor sweeping the ghetto about Jewish workers in a labor camp near Lublin who had supposedly killed their German guards; 180 Jews were said to have escaped.

“We are more than certain that this rumor is not true. It had been produced by our deep sense of shame that in Warsaw, this mother city of Israel, in this city with its great masses of tough working Jews, and its traditions of political struggle—the Jews should have let themselves be led like sheep to the slaughter.”

Rachel Auerbach - “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem” (Psalm 137) (pp 203-204)

I saw a flood once in the mountains. Wooden huts, torn from their foundations were carried above the raging waters. One could see lighted lamps in them, men, women, and children in cradles tied to ceiling beams. Other huts were empty inside but one could see a tangle of arms waving from the roof, like branches blowing in the wind waving desperately toward heaven, toward the riverbanks for help. At a distance one could see mouths gaping, but one could not hear the cries because the roar of the waters drowned out everything.

And that’s how the Jewish masses flowed to their destruction at the time of the deportations. Sinking as helplessly into the deluge of destruction.

And if for even one of the days of my life I should forget how I saw you then, my people, desperate and confused, delivered over to extinction, may all knowledge of me be forgotten and my name be cursed like that of those traitors who are unworthy to share your pain.¹⁸⁸

THE JEWISH WOMAN (pp 239-241)

The future historian will have to devote [much attention] . . . to the role of the Jewish woman in the war. She will receive an honored place in Jewish history because of her

courage and powers of endurance which enable thousands of families to survive this bitter time. Lately we have seen an interesting phenomenon. In many house committees women are replacing men who are leaving because they are burned out and tired. There are now house committees where women comprise the entire leadership. This reservoir [of fresh cadres] is very important for the [Aleynhilf]. (June 10, 1942)³⁰

From the very first day of the war Jewish women began to assume unprecedented responsibilities. Politics—the domain of men—quickly took a back seat to the challenges of the everyday: finding food and maintaining moral and psychological equilibrium in conditions of rupture. The war had also produced a marked decline in the proportion of able-bodied men in the overall Jewish population, and with it a basic change in the relative importance of women in bearing the burden of ensuring family survival.³⁶ At the end of October 1939 the Jewish population of Warsaw numbered 164,307 men (46 percent) and 195,520 women (54 percent). If one only counted those between the ages of sixteen and fifty-nine, then the disparity expanded to 44—56 percent in favor of women. On January 31, 1942, out of a total Jewish population of 368,902, there were 157,410 males and 211,492 females. But among the twenty to twenty-nine year olds, women constituted 65 percent! Several factors caused this demographic imbalance. On the eve of the war many men had been drafted into the Polish army; a large percentage were either killed or did not return from German POW camps. On September 6, 1939, after the Polish government called on all able-bodied men in Warsaw to cross the Vistula and head east, many left their families and did not return. Even after the start of the German occupation many men continued to go east, believing they were more vulnerable to German arrest than their families. In 1940 and 1941 constant manhunts to fill the forced labor camps took many men and left others afraid to be seen on the street. Therefore it was their wives and daughters who had to earn money. Ringelblum observed:

the toughness of women. The chief earners. The men don't go out. When they [catch a man for labor], the wife is not afraid. She runs along, yells, screams. She's not afraid of the soldiers. She stands in long lines [for food]. (early January 1940)³⁷

As several scholars have pointed out, war and its massive assault on Jewish society led to a reversal of gender roles and a new emphasis on values that had traditionally been the purview of women. The Germans had rendered men powerless, unable to protect their families They had become “women,” and the women had to become “men.”³⁸

THE CHILDREN (pp 260-264)

The numbers of children were staggering. Of the ghetto's one hundred thousand children under the age of fourteen, as many as 80 percent needed help. Many children were orphans, as their parents had died of hunger. Children who lived in the dangerous typhus-ridden refugee centers had to be taken out of that environment and given clean clothing and food. As the streets filled with dying children, many turned to petty thievery. Parents, unable to feed their children, became increasingly desperate and ultimately left them at the door of an orphanage or children's center.

A cursory survey of imperfect statistics for October 1941 shows that little more than half the needy children in the ghetto were receiving some kind of help.⁶⁹

The most terrible thing is to look at the freezing children, children with bare feet, bare knees, and tattered clothes, who stand mutely in the streets and cry. Today in the evening I heard the wailing of a little tot of three or four years. Probably tomorrow morning they will find his little corpse. [Even in October] they found the bodies of seventeen children in the stairwells of destroyed buildings. Frozen children are a common occurrence. The police are supposed to open a special place on Nowolipie 20 where street children will be collected, but in the meantime children's corpses and children's crying are the constant backdrop of the ghetto. The public covers the children's corpses with beautiful posters made for the "Month of the Child" campaign, posters that bear the slogan, "Our Children Must Live: The Child is our Holiest Resource!" In this manner the public wants to protest the fact that the CENTOS does nothing to gather up these children and save them from death, especially when it has become known that the CENTOS has collected close to one million zlotys.⁷⁰

After all, the child is the holy of holies of any community; it is its future, its vitality and its mainstay. The Jewish community must bear responsibility for the state of the younger generation; it should consider no burden too great; it should accept every challenge and effort to save the Jewish child from destruction. The concern for the state of the younger generation is the historic obligation of Jewish society. It is also our most pressing concern today. Each lost day hastens the specter of catastrophe; help must come quickly and effectively. Jewish society has the responsibility to feed the hungry child, clothe the naked, care for the abandoned and provide shelter for the orphans and the homeless

children. [Only if this happens] will Warsaw Jewry be able to stand before the tribunal of history with a clear conscience, knowing that it had done all it could and did not allow the destruction of the younger generation to take place.⁷²

In April 1942 the archive collected a number of accounts of older children who were living in the refugee centers. Fourteen-year-old Chil Brajtman, from Maciejowice, wrote that his family was deported to Warsaw in November 1940. They lived in a refugee center, where the windows were broken and where it was so cold that the soup froze. His father died of starvation in March 1941, and his mother starved to death in June.

During the course of the day I would not eat until two in the afternoon, at the CENTOS. Hunger tortured me, I knew that I would die of hunger, I did not want to beg so I started to smuggle. That was a tough way to earn one's bread. Once a Polish policeman beat me [very badly]...but better a beating than death. Often gendarmes would put the barrel of a pistol to my skull... Then I would return hungry and tired, unable to eat.

I have saved myself so far, my 17-year--old brother died in February 1941, my sister died in March 1942 of dysentery. My oldest sister is still in the refugee center, where she is starving. I am sorry that here in this children's home, my smuggling skills have gotten rusty, because I would like to be able to help my sister.

My worst memories? I'll remember the refugee center my whole life...

Best memories? The Jewish holidays at home, long walks in the fields in the summer.

What does war mean? No work, that's war. Just hunger.

Plans after the war? None. I think that as long as I live, nothing will change.

What does war mean? Well, there are two kinds of war, the war against hunger and the war with bullets. The hunger war is worse because then everybody suffers, a bullet will kill you quickly.

Plans for the future? I'll become a watchmaker, an easy job.

Temporary Survival (p184)

Yet, ironically, in the months before the Great Deportation, there were signs that the ghetto economy had stabilized and that the Jews' dogged battle to stay alive was finally beginning to show some results. The monthly death toll had begun to drop, and slowly new sources of employment were opening up. From the beginning of the war until July 1942 close to one hundred thousand Jews had died of starvation and disease. But about 70 percent of the original ghetto population was still alive. As Israel Gutman points out [on the eve of the Great Deportation]:

The population of the ghetto had actually managed to overcome the worst. The incidence of fatal disease began to decrease; the weaker elements of the population had already succumbed to death; more sources of employment and subsistence had been created; and the expectation grew that, in spite of everything, the majority would succeed in surviving the war.¹²¹

Unfortunately the Germans now had other plans for Warsaw Jewry.

The Lack of Income (p. 282)

Next month there won't be any furniture left. But this is a normal budget of a fortunate, middle-class citizen of the ghetto. There is some income, it is steady, and that in itself arouses the envy of many ghetto inhabitants. Yet the diet is skimpy, based mainly on bread and potatoes, and soon there will not be the money to pay the rent. And when sickness comes, which is inevitable in the conditions of the ghetto, even this budget will collapse.

I have no idea how people live who do not have steady incomes.

I think they don't really have a budget. They sell something, buy bread and potatoes, pay rent. When the money runs out, they sell more of their possessions. When there is nothing left to sell, that's the end. And that fate awaits most of us, because all savings will run out sooner or later. It is only a question of time and frugality. But the end is the same, and when it comes is simply a question of who will die sooner and who later. . . Each of us is waiting in the queue)^{2°}

The World's Indifference (p,296)

... the world was indifferent to our tragedy, which is unprecedented in human history. We were angry at the Polish community [*efentlekhkayt*] and at those in contact with the Polish government because there were no transmissions about the murders of the Polish Jews, and the world remained in ignorance of what was happening. We blamed the Polish leaders for deliberately suppressing the news of our tragedy because we suspected that they did not want that news to overshadow what was happening to them. But now it is clear that all these efforts have achieved something. [In June there have been several

broadcasts about Belzec, Cheimno, Vilna, etc.] The BBC mentioned the figure of seven hundred thousand murdered Jews. It also warned that these crimes would exact revenge and justice.⁴⁴ (Emanuel Ringelblum's Diary entry of June 26, 1942)

Ringelblum allowed himself some optimism that the BBC broadcast had vindicated the work of the Oyneg Shabes and might even have saved the remnants of Polish Jewry:

“The Oyneg Shabes has [through sending this information] performed a great historical mission. It has alerted the world to our fate and perhaps rescued hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews from extermination. The near future will show whether these hopes [of rescue] will come true. I don't know who from our group will remain alive—who will be fated to live to work on the gathered materials. But one thing is clear to all of us; our effort and our toil and our dedication have not been in vain. We have dealt a blow to the enemy. Even if [the news has no effect] we know one thing: we have done our duty. We overcame all the obstacles and barriers and achieved what we set out to do. Even our death won't be as meaningless as the deaths of tens of thousands of other Jews; at least [we will die] knowing that we hurt the enemy. We have unmasked his devilish plan to destroy Polish Jewry, something he wanted to do in secret. We have upset his plans and have revealed his cards. And if England keeps its word and goes through with its threats. . . then maybe we'll be saved after all.

The Poetry of Martyrdom

“Vey dir” (Woe to you),

The poet Yitzhak Katzenelson wrote a poem, “Vey dir” (Woe to you), cursing the German people, pronouncing that they would be haunted forever /by the murder of the Jews. Murdered Jewish children would not simply disappear and crimes would not be unavenged; the dead victims would return *I* and devour the lives and souls of the German nation:

We will stand on all the roads.
Quiet. quiet like the grass.
Quietly stand and quietly ask,
Why did you kill us, why?

Bloody and filthy you will scurry
Engulfed in wild terror;
But we the dead will block all your roads
Wherever you run, you will see us.

We the murdered will look at you silently
In our agony we will mutely stare;
And looking at you we will silently devour you
And gnaw at your bones.⁸⁵

“Where Is God?”

Another Yiddish poem pulled out of the milk cans of the second part of the archive, written by an unknown author, was titled, simply, “Where Is God?” The spelling mistakes in the poem and the Polish-Yiddish dialect indicated that the writer was a simple, religious Jew:

Angels and spirits
Smash the commandments
Darkness all around
Is God anywhere?
In chaos and confusion
A people goes under.
They destroy the highest commandment
And where is God?⁸⁶

THE POETS OF A DYING GHETTO: YITZHAK KATZENELSON AND WLADYSLAW SZLENGEL

Waldyslaw Szlengel “Pomnik” (The monument)

Jewish woman, a mother and a wife, deported to Treblinka, leaving behind a husband and a son
who were working in a German shop:
For heroes—poems and rhapsodies!!!
For heroes—the homage of posterity,
Their names etched in the plinths,
for them a monument of marble.
But who will tell you, the people of the future,
Not about bronze or mythic tales
But that they took her—killed her,
That she is no more.

Was she good?
Not really.
She often quarreled,
She would slam the door,
She would scold,
But.. . she was.

This unremarkable woman gave her husband and son a home. In the ghetto
they would return to her, to “warm soup, or a white towel.”

And they took her,
She left just as she was,
Standing near the kitchen stove;
She did not finish the soup.
They took her, she went,
She is no more, they have killed her.⁹²

Now the husband and son return to an empty room, to unmade beds, to their loved one's only monument—a cold pot on the stove.

The Jews, left in the ghetto, including Abraham Lewin or Yitzhak Katzenelson, had no graves to visit, and few had had a chance to say good-bye. They simply returned one day to find their wives gone, their children gone. How their loved ones suffered in their final hours, they now knew far too well: the hell in the boxcar, the ramp at Treblinka, the stampede to the gas chambers.

Waldyslaw Szlengel "It Is Time"

And when the killers will have pushed you and forced you
And dragged, stuffed you into the steam chamber
And sealed the hatch behind you,
The hot steam will begin to suffocate you, to suffocate you,
And you will scream, you will try to run—
And after the torture of dying will have stopped,
Then they will drag you out and throw you in a horrible pit;
They will put your stars out—the gold teeth in your jaw—
And you will turn into ashes.⁹³

Galvanized by the January fighting, Szlengel began to see his poems as a new weapon to encourage resistance.¹⁵ For the vast majority who could not join the ŻOB, this new will to live and to resist meant building a bunker. In his "What I Read to the Dead," Szlengel described the aftermath of the January \ fighting:

Cement and bricks are being brought, the nights resound with the pounding of hammers and pickaxes. Water is pumped, wells are dug in basements. The shelters. A mania, a rush, a cardiac neurosis of the Warsaw Ghetto. Lighting, underground cables, drilling the passages, bricks again, ropes, sand. . . lots of sand. Sand. Bunks, cots. Supplies sufficient for months. Electricity, waterworks. . . Twenty centuries are written off by the SS man's whip. The cave epoch returns, oil lamps, village type wells. The long night has begun. People are going back under the ground. To escape from animals.¹⁶

A section of "Song of the Murdered Jewish People," titled "To the Heavens," by Yitzhak Katzenelson

Have we changed so much that you don't recognize us as of old?
But why, we are the same—the same Jews that we were, not different,
Not I. . . Not I will to the prophets be compared, lo and behold!
But they, the millions of my murdered ones, those murdered out of hand.
It's they. . . they suffered more and greater pains each one.
The little, simple ordinary Jew from Poland of today...
Compared to him, what are the great men of a bygone past?
A wailing Jeremiah, Job afflicted, Kings despairing, all in one—it's they!
You have no God in you! Open the doors, you heavens, open wide,
And let the children of my murdered people enter in a stream.

Open the doors for the great procession of the crucified,
The children of my people, all of them, each of them a God—make
room!’⁵

Jewish Passivity (p 350)

In June 1942, when he knew that the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto might start at any time, Ringelblum wrestled to understand this apparent Jewish passivity. An acquaintance from Biaka Podlaska who had witnessed the deportation of the local Jews to the Sobibór death camp, had asked Ringelblum:

How long? How long will we go like sheep to the slaughter? Why are we quiet? Why doesn't anybody launch the call to go into the forests, to fight back?⁶⁵

In the end, Ringelblum found an explanation that redounded to the credit of the Jewish masses:

Jews did not resist anywhere, they passively went to their deaths and they did so in order to let the other Jews remain alive. Because each Jew knew that to raise a hand against the Germans meant that he was endangering fellow Jews in another city and perhaps even in another country. For this reason three hundred POWs let themselves be shot on the road from Lublin to Biala, even though these were soldiers who had fought bravely for Poland's freedom. To be passive, not to lift up a hand against the Germans, this has become the quiet, passive heroism of the ordinary Jew [*iz gevorn dos shtile passive heldentum fun dem yidishn masnmensch*]. This, it seems, had been the quiet vital instinct of the masses, which tells every- one that they should act in this way and in no other. And I think that no agitation or propaganda can help here. It is impossible to fight a mass instinct, one can only submit to it.⁶⁷

Thus, in the same entry in his diary, Ringelblum offered two contradictory explanations of the Jewish refusal to fight back, one attributable to the cost of years of horrors, the other a morally grounded active choice of the Jewish masses who, in order to protect their fellow Jews from German reprisals, renounced the urge to resist.

After the end of the first phase of the Great Deportation in the fall of 1942, Ringelblum returned to his analysis of Jewish responses to Nazi genocide. A short note entitled “WHY?” written on October 15, 1942, reveals pain and puzzlement:

Why was there no resistance when they [Germans] deported three hundred thousand Jews from Warsaw? Why did the Jews let themselves be taken like sheep to the slaughter? Why did the enemy have such an easy and smooth task? Why did the executioners not suffer even a single death? Why could fifty SS men (some say even fewer), with the help of a detachment of two hundred Ukrainians and Latvians, carry this out without difficulties?⁶⁸

The Oyneg Shabes - Ringelblum Archive

30,000 pages of documents, cultural posters, official pronouncements, and artifacts before it was buried by its keepers, almost all of whom eventually died at the Nazis' hands.

Even before the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto (1940-1943) knew of the “Final Solution,” they understood that their story needed to be preserved. Under the leadership of Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum, a clandestine organization of about 60 researchers with the code name Oyneg Shabes (“the joy of Shabbat”) compiled and documented the experiences of the Jews of Warsaw under Nazi occupation. “It was an extraordinary act of civil resistance,” says historian Samuel Kassow, author of *Who Will Write Our History: Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto*. “The Jews knew that the Germans wanted to control and determine how they would be remembered. They were determined to write their own history.”

Their goals evolved over time. When the project began in 1940, the researchers—a group that included historians, writers, artists, rabbis and social workers—simply wanted to collect information about the nearly 500,000 people imprisoned in the ghetto. They gathered diaries, essays, wills, photographs, poetry, paintings and items such as menus, concert tickets and candy wrappers to help record everyday life. But in 1941, as their fate became more evident, they distributed surveys that included questions on everything from the lives of Jewish women to corruption to religious life. The plan was to produce a book that would help people after the war learn from, and not repeat, the past. But on July 22, 1942, the deportations to the concentration camp Treblinka began, and Ringelblum hastily ordered the researchers to turn in everything they had in hand.

On August 2, 6,276 Jews were seized from the ghetto. Very early the next morning, the first part of the archive was buried in ten metal boxes in the brick foundation of an old school building at 68 Nowolipki Street. David Graber, age 19, placed a note inside the top of one box that read, “I would love to see the moment in which the great treasure will be dug up and scream the truth at the world. May the treasure fall into good hands, may it last into better times, may it alarm and alert the world to what happened...in the 20th century....May history be our witness.” Just hours later, 6,458 more Jews were deported, including Graber, who perished in Treblinka.

To get word out about the genocide, the remaining members of Oyneg Shabes smuggled four reports to the Polish resistance that were shared with the British and American governments. The reports included detailed documentation of the mass murder in the concentration camps and contained a hand-drawn map of Treblinka. At the time, these reports were one of the West’s major sources of information about the “Final Solution.” Oyneg Shabes also buried two more

caches of information, one in February of 1943, as residents of the ghetto starved and froze, and the last one just a week before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began on April 19, 1943.

Only three members of Oyneg Shabes survived the war, and only one knew where the archive had been buried. In 1946, after months of careful calculating, a crew located the rubble of the old schoolhouse and dug beneath it to find ten metal boxes with documents intact, with only minor water damage. In 1950, construction workers at a new post-war housing complex in communist Warsaw accidentally stumbled upon two metal milk cans filled with documents, bringing the total number of items recovered, in what is now called the Ringelblum Archive, to 35,000. All efforts, however, to find the last and largest cache of documents have failed. In 2014, archaeologists excavated the garden of the Chinese embassy that now stands on what was Nowolipki Street, but they found only a few burnt pages of a diary.

Background and Attitudes Concerning the Righteous among the Nations

Attitudes towards the Jews during the Holocaust mostly ranged from indifference to hostility. The mainstream watched as their former neighbors were rounded up and killed; some collaborated with the perpetrators; many benefited from the expropriation of the Jews property.

In a world of total moral collapse, there was a small minority who mustered extraordinary courage to uphold human values. These were the Righteous Among the Nations. They stand in stark contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility that prevailed during the Holocaust. Contrary to the general trend, these rescuers regarded the Jews as fellow human beings who came within the bounds of their universe of obligation.

Most rescuers started off as bystanders. In many cases this happened when they were confronted with the deportation or the killing of the Jews. Some had stood by in the early stages of persecution, when the rights of Jews were restricted and their property confiscated, but there was a point when they decided to act, a boundary they were not willing to cross. Unlike others, they did not fall into a pattern of acquiescing to the escalating measures against the Jews.

In many cases it was the Jews who turned to the non-Jew for help. It was not only the rescuers who demonstrated resourcefulness and courage, but also the Jews who fought for their survival. Wolfgang Benz, who did extensive research on rescue of Jews during the Holocaust claims that when listening to rescue stories, the rescued persons may seem to be only objects for care and charity, however "the attempt to survive in illegality was before anything else a self-assertion and an act of Jewish resistance against the Nazi regime. Only few were successful in this resistance".

Faced with Jews knocking on their door, bystanders were faced with the need to make an instant decision. This was usually an instinctive human gesture, taken on the spur of the moment and only then to be followed by a moral choice. Often it was a gradual process, with the rescuers becoming increasingly involved in helping the persecuted Jews. Agreeing to hide someone during a raid or roundup - to provide shelter for a day or two until something else could be found - would evolve into a rescue that lasted months and years.

The price that rescuers had to pay for their action differed from one country to another. In Eastern Europe, the Germans executed not only the people who

sheltered Jews, but their entire family as well. Notices warning the population against helping the Jews were posted everywhere. Generally speaking punishment was less severe in Western Europe, although there too the consequences could be formidable and some of the Righteous Among the Nations were incarcerated in camps and killed. Moreover, seeing the brutal treatment of the Jews and the determination on the part of the perpetrators to hunt down every single Jew, people must have feared that they would suffer greatly if they attempted to help the persecuted. In consequence, rescuers and rescued lived under constant fear of being caught; there was always the danger of denunciation by neighbors or collaborators. This increased the risk and made it more difficult for ordinary people to defy the conventions and rules. Those who decided to shelter Jews had to sacrifice their normal lives and to embark upon a clandestine existence – often against the accepted norms of the society in which they lived, in fear of their neighbors and friends – and to accept a life ruled by dread of denunciation and capture.

Most rescuers were ordinary people. Some acted out of political, ideological or religious convictions; others were not idealists, but merely human beings who cared about the people around them. In many cases they never planned to become rescuers and were totally unprepared for the moment in which they had to make such a far-reaching decision. They were ordinary human beings, and it is precisely their humanity that touches us and should serve as a model. The Righteous are Christians from all denominations and churches, Muslims and agnostics; men and women of all ages; they come from all walks of life; highly educated people as well as illiterate peasants; public figures as well as people from society's margins; city dwellers and farmers from the remotest corners of Europe; university professors, teachers, physicians, clergy, nuns, diplomats, simple workers, servants, resistance fighters, policemen, peasants, fishermen, a zoo director, a circus owner, and many more.

Scholars have attempted to trace the characteristics that these Righteous share and to identify who was more likely to extend help to the Jews or to a persecuted person. Some claim that the Righteous are a diverse group and the only common denominator are the humanity and courage they displayed by standing up for their moral principles. Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner defined the altruistic personality. By comparing and contrasting rescuers and bystanders during the Holocaust, they pointed out that those who intervened were distinguished by characteristics such as empathy and a sense of connection to others. Nehama Tec who also studied many cases of Righteous, found a cluster of shared

characteristics and conditions of separateness, individuality or marginality. The rescuers' independence enabled them to act against the accepted conventions and beliefs.

Bystanders were the rule, rescuers were the exception. However difficult and frightening, the fact that some found the courage to become rescuers demonstrates that some freedom of choice existed, and that saving Jews was not beyond the capacity of ordinary people throughout occupied Europe. The Righteous Among the Nations teach us that every person can make a difference.

There were different degrees of help: some people gave food to Jews, thrusting an apple into their pocket or leaving food where they would pass on their way to work. Others directed Jews to people who could help them; some sheltered Jews for one night and told them they would have to leave in the morning. Only few assumed the entire responsibility for the Jews' survival. It is mostly the last group that qualifies for the title of the Righteous Among the Nations.

The main forms of help extended by the Righteous Among the Nations:

Hiding Jews in the rescuers' home or on their property. In the rural areas in Eastern Europe hideouts or bunkers, as they were called, were dug under houses, cowsheds, barns, where the Jews would be concealed from sight. In addition to the threat of death that hung over the Jews' heads, physical conditions in such dark, cold, airless and crowded places over long periods of time were very hard to bear. The rescuers, whose life was terrorized too, would undertake to provide food – not an easy feat for poor families in wartime – removing the excrements, and taking care of all their wards' needs. Jews were also hidden in attics, hideouts in the forest, and in any place that could provide shelter and concealment, such as a cemetery, sewers, animal cages in a zoo, etc. Sometimes the hiding Jews were presented as non-Jews, as relatives or adopted children. Jews were also hidden in apartments in cities, and children were placed in convents with the nuns concealing their true identity. In Western Europe Jews were mostly hidden in houses, farms or convents.

Providing false papers and false identities - in order for Jews to assume the identity of non-Jews they needed false papers and assistance in establishing an existence under an assumed identity. Rescuers in this case would be forgers or officials who produced false documents, clergy who faked baptism certificates, and some foreign diplomats who issued visas or passports contrary to their country's instructions and policy. Diplomats in Budapest in late 1944 issued protective

papers and hung their countries flags over whole buildings, so as to put Jews under their country's diplomatic immunity. Some German rescuers, like Oskar Schindler, used deceitful pretexts to protect their workers from deportation claiming the Jews were required by the army for the war effort.

Smuggling and assisting Jews to escape – some rescuers helped Jews get out of a zone of special danger in order to escape to a less dangerous location. Smuggling Jews out of ghettos and prisons, helping them cross borders into unoccupied countries or into areas where the persecution was less intense, for example to neutral Switzerland, into Italian controlled parts where there were no deportations, or Hungary before the German occupation in March 1944.

The rescue of children - parents were faced with agonizing dilemmas to separate from their children and give them away in the hope of increasing their chances of survival. In some cases children who were left alone after their parents had been killed would be taken in by families or convents. In many cases it was individuals who decided to take in a child; in other cases and in some countries, especially Poland, Belgium, Holland and France, there were underground organizations that found homes for children, provided the necessary funds, food and medication, and made sure that the children were well cared for.

Sources: The Righteous Among the Nations

Joop & Willy Westerweel

The Netherlands

Westerweel, Johan Gerard & Wilhelmina Dora (Bosdriesz) Johan (Joop) Westerweel were one of the most daring and successful of the Dutch Resistance leaders until his execution by the Nazis in August 1944. His background in education and his unconventional parents, who belonged to a non-consensual sect of Protestantism, the Derbists, prepared him for the work he did in the last years of his life. Joop's motto was one of non-violent resistance. As a convinced pacifist, he had been expelled from the Dutch East Indies for refusing to be drafted into the army. Joop never abandoned his idealistic principles. His strict Christian background instilled in him a sense of justice for all and a belief in the basic goodness of man. He began teaching in a school at the Werkplaats in Bilthoven, where the progressive and innovative educational methods of its founder, Kees Boeke*, were applied. In 1940, Joop and his wife, Wilhelmina (Wil), moved to Rotterdam, where Joop was offered a position as principal of one of the Montessori schools. In Bilthoven, the Westerweels had already come into contact with Jewish refugee children, who had been arriving in Holland in the 1930s, mainly from Germany. By 1942, the couple had four children. Even before their association with the Zionist pioneer groups, the Westerweels had taken Jewish refugees into their home. Joop's colleague and friend from the Werkplaats, Mirjam Waterman (later Pinkhof), introduced him to a group of young pioneers (halutzim) in Loosdrecht, near Amsterdam, in whom he recognized a sense of idealism and strong principles, which he found attractive.

The community consisted mainly of youngsters, aged between 15 and 19, originating from Central and Eastern Europe. They came to Holland for agricultural training in preparation for immigration to Eretz Yisrael. Joop admired the group's

cohesiveness, their inner discipline, and their optimism. Most of all, Joop admired Shushu (Joachim) Simon, a young intellectual from Berlin. In him he discovered a soulmate, a fellow thinker-idealist, with whom he formed a close friendship. Although Joop and Wil were not new to illegal activities, having sheltered Jews three times in Rotterdam---they moved to a different apartment each time---their involvement with the halutzim groups began only in July 1942, with the onset of the mass deportation of Jews. When the Loosdrecht group received a tip-off from the Jewish Council on August 15, 1943, that they were about to be deported, Joop and his friends, who became known as the Westerweel* group, were on hand to provide a hiding place for each of the 50 members. By August 17, 1943, all the young pioneers had vanished and of this group of 50, 33 survived the war, the rest being deported after betrayal. The experience showed Joop and his colleagues that hiding was far from being a perfect solution. Joop had heard of the possibility of crossing the border into Belgium and from there traveling to France and neutral Spain, where it would be possible to reach Eretz Yisrael by boat. The Westerweel group, in collaboration with the Hehalutz movement, decided to concentrate on helping the members escape Dutch territory altogether. In September 1942, an attempt was made to help eight Jewish pioneers escape to neutral Switzerland. The group was caught crossing the Dutch-Belgian border and all were arrested and deported to Auschwitz. A second group reached Switzerland. In December 1943, Joop succeeded in leading a group of halutzim from Holland through Belgium to France. From there they could cross the border to Spain and ultimately reach Eretz Yisrael. At the foot of the Pyrenees, in a dramatic address to the young halutzim with whom he was about to part, Joop urged them to remember the suffering in the world at large. He implored them to accord freedom and dignity to all inhabitants of a future Jewish State. "No more war," were his final words as they parted company. Later that month, Wil was arrested during an attempt to free Lettie Rudelsheim (later Ben Heled), one of the most active halutz members, from the Scheveningen prison. Wil was taken to the Vught concentration camp, where she remained for about a year, and during which time she witnessed the execution of her husband. She was later transferred to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she was subjected to forced labor and contracted a heart disease. She was later allowed to go to Sweden as part of a prisoner exchange and returned to Holland after the war. In the meantime, the Westerweels' four children went into hiding with friends of the family. After his wife's arrest, Joop had quit his post at the Montessori school. On March 11, 1944, Joop and his co-worker Bouke Koning* were caught at the Belgian border with two Jewish women from Youth Aliyah whom they were escorting. Joop was imprisoned in Vught and tortured. He soon became a spiritual leader for many of the prisoners since his unfailing high spirits in the face of cruel interrogation and the prospect of execution gave those around him hope and strength. His last communication with the outside world was a poem, entitled "Avond in de Cel" (Evening in the Cell), written in July 1944, and full of optimism, speaking of the beauty of nature and a life of fulfillment and inner conviction. On August 11, 1944, Joop Westerweel was executed in the Vught concentration camp. On June 16, 1964, Yad Vashem recognized Johan Gerard Westerweel and his wife, Wilhelmina Dora Westerweel-Bosdriesz, as Righteous Among the Nations.

Charles Coward

Coward joined the Army in June 1924 and was captured in May 1940 near Calais while serving with the 8th Reserve Regimental Royal Artillery as BQMS, Battery Quartermaster Sergeant. He managed to make two escape attempts before even reaching a prisoner of war camp, then made seven further escapes; on one memorable occasion managing to be awarded the Iron Cross while posing as a wounded soldier in a German Army field hospital.[2] When in captivity he was equally troublesome to his captors, arranging several acts of sabotage while out on work details.

Finally in December 1943 he was transferred to the Auschwitz III (Monowitz) labour camp (Arbeitslager), situated only five miles from the better-known extermination camp of Auschwitz II (Birkenau). Monowitz was under the direction of the industrial company IG Farben, who were building a Buna (synthetic rubber) and liquid fuel plant there. It housed over 10,000 Jewish slave labourers, as well as POWs and forced labourers from all over occupied Europe. Coward and other British POWs were housed in sub-camp E715, administered by Stalag VIII-B.[3]

Thanks to his command of the German language, Coward was appointed Red Cross liaison officer for the 1,200-1,400 British prisoners.[4] In this trusted role he was allowed to move fairly freely throughout the camp and often to

surrounding towns.[5] He witnessed the arrival of trainloads of Jews to the extermination camp. Coward and other British prisoners smuggled food and other items to the Jewish inmates. He also exchanged coded messages with the British authorities via letters to a fictitious Mr William Orange (Code for the War Office), giving military information, notes on the conditions of POWs and the other prisoners in the camps, as well as dates and numbers of the arrival of trainloads of Jews.[5]

On one occasion a note was smuggled to him from a Jewish-British ship's doctor, who was being held in Mankowitz.[6] Coward determined to contact him direct, managed to swap clothes with an inmate on a work detail and spent the night in the Jewish camp, seeing at first hand the horrific conditions in which these were held.[4] He failed to find the individual, later found to be Karel Sperber - see below. This experience formed the basis of his subsequent testimony in post-war legal proceedings.

Determined to do something about it, Coward used Red Cross supplies, particularly chocolate, to "buy" from the SS guards corpses of dead prisoners, including Belgian and French civilian forced labourers.[7] He then gave the documents and clothes taken from the non-Jewish corpses to the Jewish escapees, who adopted these new identities and were then smuggled out of the camp altogether.[7] Coward carried out this scheme on numerous occasions and is estimated to have saved at least 400 Jewish slave labourers.[7]

In December 1944 Coward was sent back to the main camp of Stalag VIII-B at Lamsdorf (now Łambinowice, Poland) and in January 1945 the POWs were marched under guard to Bavaria, where they were eventually liberated.[8]

In 1963 Yad Vashem recognized Coward as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. He became known as the "Count of Auschwitz." and a film was made of his exploits called "The Password is Courage."

THE STORY OF RAOUL WALLENBERG

In 1943, 800,000 Jews lived in Hungary. The Nazis demanded that the Hungarians surrender the Jews for deportation. Knowing that the Jews would end up in the gas chamber, the Hungarian government stalled. In March of 1944, Hitler sent in troops to occupy the country. The cabinet resigned and a puppet regime took over, eager to please Hitler. It issued sweeping anti-Jewish decrees, set up ghettos, and began deportations. Death trains from all over the land headed for Auschwitz. In a few months the Germans deported 435,000 Jews from the provinces.

Meanwhile, Adolf Eichmann prepared a plan to round up the Jews in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Eichmann was dedicated to destroying every Jew he could lay his hands on before the war ended. He had already gone a long way toward destroying the 800,000 Jews of Hungary. Only 230,000 Jews remained trapped in Budapest. Eichmann planned a swift roundup of the capital's Jews.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, a young man by the name of Raoul Wallenberg was asked to go to Hungary and help get as many Jews as possible out of Hitler's hands. Wallenberg accepted the assignment, and, traveling with a Swedish diplomatic passport, he undertook his mission with energy and dedication.

When he arrived in Budapest, his first step was to establish what was known as "Section C" at the Swedish embassy; its sole purpose being to rescue Jews. He designed an impressive-looking Swedish passport to replace the casual certificates issued thus far. He embellished the passport with Royal Swedish crowns, seals, stamps, and his signature. It had no validity whatsoever, but it was so convincing that the German and Hungarian bureaucrats believed that its holders were the protected wards of a major neutral power rather than abandoned outcasts. The Jews who were given the passports felt optimistic again; they were no longer to be treated as "things," but as respected human beings. Wallenberg induced the German and Hungarian officials to accept first a few, then hundreds, then thousands of these passports. Soon other neutrals followed in his path, issuing protective passports. These passports saved thousands of lives.

To help Jews desperately in need, Wallenberg set up children's shelters, clinics, nurseries, and soup kitchens, and stocked them with provisions. He rented or purchased buildings and housed Jews under Swedish protection. These projects were financed with the ample funds supplied by the American Joint Distribution Committee, the War Refugee Board, and the International Red Cross. Wallenberg then coordinated the relief and rescue efforts of all the neutrals in Budapest. His staff rose to 400. There was so much to be done that he slept very little. His devotion, boundless energy and organizational skills were an inspiration to everyone around him.

Finally, the Nazis, anxious to send Jews to their death, installed the Hungarian Nazi party, the "Arrow Cross," to rule the country. The first night the Arrow Cross government was in power, many Jews were arrested and disappeared. The Jews of Budapest, living in houses marked by a yellow star, were ordered to stay in their homes. Jews who ventured out were murdered in the streets. Fascist gangs, often teenagers, invaded homes, looting, flogging, and killing Jews.

Wallenberg organized strong young Hungarian Jews into commando squads to protect blockaded Jews and bring them food and medicine.

The number of Jews protected by documents was about 16,000. This left nearly 200,000 without papers. Eichmann and the Fascist government still meant to murder them. In November of 1944, with the rail system collapsing, Eichmann began deportations to Auschwitz on foot.

In freezing rain, the people walked twenty to twenty-five miles a day, with the Hungarians whipping those who faltered. If they dropped, they were left to perish in the ditches. About

27,000 Jews were driven on foot 120 miles to the border, then herded onto trains bound for a death camp.

It was during the forced marches of those terrible weeks that Wallenberg saved even more Jews. He rode tirelessly up and down that road, distributing food, medicine, and warm clothing to the hounded Jews. He carried his "book of life," a book with the names of Jews to whom passports had been issued, and blank passports as well, which he filled in and issued on the spot. On one such trip he saved about a hundred Jews, often using sheer bluff. Again and again, he and his helpers made that journey; they rescued about 2,000 Jews, bringing them back to Budapest.

Wallenberg's courage was tried against the greatest odds. Once an armed patrol of Arrow Cross men invaded a group of Swedish-protected houses and began to drag the Jews out. Raoul raced to the district and shouted, "This is Swedish-protected territory! If you want to take them you will have to shoot me first!" The patrol let the Jews go. On another occasion, Wallenberg received word that eleven Jews with Swedish passports had been forced onto a train headed for Austria. He chased the train in his diplomatic car, caught up with it just as it reached the border, and got the eleven people released.

By early December, the Russians had entered the suburbs of Budapest. In the absence of law and order, bands of thugs looted Jewish homes and murdered the inhabitants.

Raoul was everywhere in this chaos. He was "a legend among the Jews," wrote one survivor. "In the complete and total hell in which we lived, there was a savior-angel somewhere, moving around." His courage and the power of his extraordinary personality worked miracles. He stood alone, relying only on his personal integrity.

With the Russian troops battering their way into the heart of the city, the Nazis converged on the Jews, determined to wipe them out in what little time remained. Raoul warned the German commander that unless he used his troops to stop the slaughter, he would be hanged for the crime. His threat worked. The final massacre was averted as the Russians broke through and captured the city in February, 1945.

About 144,000 Jews survived in Budapest. They were the only Jewish community of considerable size left in Europe. When the survivors looked for Wallenberg to show him their gratitude, he was nowhere to be found. Later it was learned that he had gone to meet the Russian commander. But instead of welcoming him as a hero, the Russians had him taken into custody. He disappeared and was never heard from again. Despite continued pressure from those trying

to determine his fate, the Russians reported nothing until 1957 when they said that he had died in a Russian prison in 1947. Nevertheless, reports persisted that he was alive somewhere inside Soviet prison walls.

Why the Russians seized him is still a mystery. It may be that they believed that he was a spy.

Irena Sendler

Sendler, Irena When World War II broke out, Irena Sendler was a 29-year-old social worker, employed by the Welfare Department of the Warsaw municipality. After the German occupation, the department continued to take care of the great number of poor and dispossessed people in the city. Irena Sendler took advantage of her job in order to help the Jews, however this became practically impossible once the ghetto was sealed off in November 1940. Close to 400,000 people had been driven into the small area that had been allocated to the ghetto, and their situation soon deteriorated. The poor hygienic conditions in the crowded ghetto, the lack of food and medical supplies resulted in epidemics and high death rates. Irena Sendler, at great personal danger, devised means to get into the ghetto and help the dying Jews. She managed to obtain a permit from the municipality that enabled her to enter the ghetto to inspect the sanitary conditions. Once inside the ghetto, she established contact with activists of the Jewish welfare organization and began to help them. She helped smuggle Jews out of the ghetto to the Aryan side and helped set up hiding places for them. When the Council for Aid of Jews (Zegota) was established, Sendler became one of its main activists. The Council was created in fall 1942, after 280,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka. When it began to function towards the end of the year, most of the Jews of Warsaw had been killed. But it played a crucial role in the rescue of a large number who had survived the massive deportations.

The organization took care of thousands of Jews who were trying to survive in hiding, seeking hiding places, and paying for the upkeep and medical care. In September 1943, four months after the Warsaw ghetto was completely destroyed, Sendler was appointed director of Zegota's Department for the Care of Jewish Children. Sendler, whose underground name was Jolanta, exploited her contacts with orphanages and institutes for abandoned children, to send Jewish children there. Many of the children were sent to the Rodzina Marii (Family of Mary) Orphanage in Warsaw, and to religious institutions run by nuns in nearby Chotomów, and in Turkowice, near Lublin. The exact number of children saved by Sendler and her partners is unknown. On 20 October 1943, Sendler was arrested. She managed to stash away incriminating evidence such as the coded addresses of children in care of Zegota and large sums of money to pay to those who helped Jews. She was sentenced to death and sent to the infamous Pawiak prison, but underground activists managed to bribe officials to release her. Her close encounter with death did not deter her from continuing her activity. After her release in February 1944, even though she knew that the authorities were keeping an eye on her, Sendler continued her underground activities. Because of the danger she had to go into hiding. The necessities of her clandestine life prevented her from attending her mother's funeral. On October 19, 1965, Yad Vashem recognized Irena Sendler as Righteous Among the Nations. The tree planted in her honor stands at the entrance to the Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations.

The Danish Resistance

Denmark was the only occupied country that actively resisted the Nazi regime's attempts to deport its Jewish citizens. On September 28, 1943, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German diplomat, secretly informed the Danish resistance that the Nazis were planning to deport the Danish Jews. The Danes responded quickly, organizing a nationwide effort to smuggle the Jews by sea to neutral Sweden.

Warned of the German plans, Jews began to leave Copenhagen, where most of the 8,000 Jews in Denmark lived, and other cities, by train, car, and on foot. With the help of the Danish people, they found hiding places in homes, hospitals, and churches. Within a two-week period fishermen helped ferry 7,220 Danish Jews and 680 non-Jewish family members to safety across the narrow body of water separating Denmark from Sweden.

Danish fishermen (foreground) ferry Jews across a narrow sound to safety in neutral Sweden during the German occupation of Denmark. Sweden, 1943.

The clandestine rescue of Danish Jews was undertaken at great personal risk. The boat pictured below and several others like it were used by one of the earliest rescue operations organized by a group of Danes code-named the "Helsingor Sewing Club." The escape route they provided, named the "Kiaer Line" after Erling Kiaer, founder of the "Helsingor Sewing Club," enabled several hundred Jews to escape across a narrow strait to the Swedish coast. On each trip, the boat carried 12-14 Jewish refugees. Kiaer himself was betrayed and arrested in May 1944.

The Danish rescue effort was unique because it was nationwide. It was not completely successful, however. Almost 500 Danish Jews were deported to the Theresienstadt (Terezin) ghetto in Czechoslovakia. Yet even of these Jews, all but 51 survived the Holocaust, largely because Danish officials pressured the Germans with their concerns for the well-being of those who had been deported. The Danes proved that widespread support for Jews and resistance to Nazi policies could save lives.

Oskar Schindler

(1908 - 1974)

Oskar Schindler was a German industrialist, former member of the Nazi Party and possibly the most famous "Righteous Gentile" who is credited with saving as many as 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust. His story was brought to international acclaim by the 1982 novel *Schindler's Ark* and the 1993 film, *Schindler's List*.

Schindler was born April 28, 1908, in Zwittau, Austria-Hungary, what is now Moravia in the Czech Republic. He grew up in a Catholic well-to-do family with all the privileges money could buy.

He married Emilie Schindler at nineteen, but was never without a mistress or two. He had presided over the demise of his family business and become a salesman when opportunity came knocking in the guise of the war.

Never one to miss a chance to make money, he marched into Poland on the heels of the SS. He dived headfirst into the black-market and the underworld and soon made friends with the local Gestapo bigwigs, softening them up with women, money and illicit booze. His newfound connections helped him acquire a factory which he ran with the cheapest labor around: Jewish.

At first he seemed like every other usurping German industrialist, driven by profit and unmoved by the means of his profiteering. But somewhere along the line, something changed.

In December 1939, as occupied Poland was being torn apart by the savagery of the Holocaust, Schindler took his first faltering steps from the darkness of Nazism towards the light of heroism. "If you saw a dog going to be crushed under a car," he said later of his wartime actions, "wouldn't you help him?"

Before the outbreak of war, Poland had been a relative haven for European Jews - Krakow's Jewish population numbered over 50,000. But when Germany invaded, destruction began immediately and it was merciless. Jews were herded into crowded ghettos, randomly beaten and humiliated, capriciously killed. Jewish property and businesses were summarily destroyed, or appropriated by the SS and 'sold' to Nazi 'investors', one of whom was the fast talking, womanizing, money hungry Schindler.

Not long after acquiring his "Emalia" factory - which produced enamel goods and munitions to supply the German front - the removal of Jews to death camps began in earnest. Schindler's Jewish accountant put him in touch with the few Jews with any remaining wealth. They invested in his factory, and in return they would be able to work there and perhaps be

spared. He was persuaded to hire more Jewish workers, designating their skills as “essential,” paying off the Nazis so they would allow them to stay in Kraków. Schindler was making money, but everyone in his factory was fed, no-one was beaten, no-one was killed. It became an oasis of humanity in a desert of moral torpor.

As the brutality of the Holocaust escalated, Schindler's protection of his Jewish workers became increasingly active. In the summer of 1942, he witnessed a German raid on the Jewish ghetto. Watching innocent people being packed onto trains bound for certain death, something awakened in him.

“Beyond this day, no thinking person could fail to see what would happen,” he said later. “I was now resolved to do everything in my power to defeat the system.”

By the autumn of 1944, Germany's hold on Poland had weakened. As the Russian army approached, the Nazi's tried desperately to complete their program of liquidation and sent all remaining Jews to die. But Schindler remained true to the “Schindlerjuden,” the workers he referred to as “my children.”

After the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto and the transfer of many Jews to the Plaszow concentration camp, Schindler used his influence to set up a branch of the camp for 900 Jewish workers in his factory compound in Zablocie and made his now famous list of the workers he would need for its operation.

The factory operated in its new location a year, making defective bullets for German guns. Conditions were grim, for the Schindlers as well as the workers. But Schindler saved most of these workers when he transferred his factory to Brunnlitz (Sudetenland) in October 1944.

When the war ended, Schindler fled to Argentina with his wife and a handful of his workers and bought a farm. In 1958, he abandoned his land, his wife and his mistress to return to Germany. He spent the remaining years of his life dividing his time between Germany and Israel, where he was honored and taken care of by his “Schindlerjuden.”

He died in Hildesheim in 1974. His extraordinary story might have died with him but for their gratitude.

In trying to answer the inevitable question, why did he do it, one of the survivors said: “I don't know what his motives were... But I don't give a damn. What's important is that he saved our lives.”

“He negotiated the salvation of his 1,300 Jews by operating right at the heart of the system using all the tools of the devil - bribery, black marketeering and lies,” said Thomas Keneally, whose book about this paradoxical man was the basis of the movie Schindler's List.

Perhaps the question is not why he did it, but rather how could he not. And perhaps the answer is unimportant. It is his actions that matter now, testimony that even in the worst of circumstances, the most ordinary of us can act courageously. If Oskar Schindler, flawed as he was, did it, then so might we, and that is reason enough to hope.