



## **To Save One Life The Story of Righteous Gentiles**

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# To Save One Life

## The Story of Righteous Gentiles

**November 1, 1998 - June 30, 1999**

Curated by Dr. William L. Shulman, *Director*

**HOLOCAUST RESOURCE CENTER AND ARCHIVES**

**Queensborough Community College**

The City University of New York · Bayside, New York

*THIS CATALOG HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE, IN PART, BY GRANTS FROM THE FOLLOWING.  
Queens Borough President Claire Shulman • The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.  
The Queens Delegation of the New York City Council • State Senator Serphin R. Maltese  
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**THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS RISKED THEIR LIVES TO SAVE FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS FROM DESTRUCTION. IT IS NOT THE STORY OF THE HOLOCAUST.**

The people you will meet in this exhibit come from many different countries and from all walks of life. Each of them had a choice to make, whether or not to stand by while friends, neighbors, indeed sometimes strangers, were seized, transported and probably murdered, or to take action – to shelter, feed, and protect that person or several people from danger. These people were the rare exceptions. The overwhelming majority were bystanders or collaborators or perpetrators.

*The Jews were singled out for destruction for no other reason than the Nazi decree that anyone with Jewish blood in his or her veins (even a Christian by belief) was a threat to the Germanic ‘superior race’ and had to be eliminated – men, women, and children, the elderly as well as infants. A sophisticated killing machine was improvised.. . reaching out to the-far corners of the European continent, and all Jews in German-occupied countries...found themselves trapped and condemned to oblivion.*

Mordecai Paldiel, *Sheltering the Jews: Stories of Holocaust Rescuers*, p.3

The question is why did even a few people risk their lives to save Jews?

Nechama Tec has written:

*Jewish rescue was a humane response to the Nazi measures of destruction. The appearance- of righteous Christians signaled an opposition to, an interference with, the German policies of annihilation.*

*Eventually each European country had some Christians who stood up for the persecuted Jews, but because these anti-Jewish measures were introduced in different places at different times, the timing of the appearance of these righteous Christians also varied from country to country.*

Nechama Tec. *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, p6

Even within the heart of the Nazi Empire, in Germany and Austria, there were those few individuals who acted to preserve Jewish lives. Yad Vashem has recognized 321 Germans and 80 Austrians as being “Righteous Among the Nations.”

*The German officer and his wife who hid a Jewish child during the war.*

*Photo Credit:  
Elka Borenstein, courtesy of  
USHMM Photo Archives*



In Western Europe the opportunity for Jews to be saved was far greater than in Eastern Europe. Among the factors that contributed to this were:

- There were fewer Jews in the general population.
- Jews were more assimilated into the society.
- Escape to neutral countries was a greater possibility.

It was possible for whole communities, indeed, in one case, for an entire nation, to act together to aid those in distress. But, even within that larger number, it was still a matter of individual judgment and action.



*Portrait of a Jewish boy, Felix Zylbersztajn, in hiding at a Belgian convent in the village of Oulter.*

*Photo Credit: Felix Zylbersztajn, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

# FRANCE

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## Le Chambon

The people of Le Chambon (located in the southeastern part of the country), led by their pastor Andre Trocme, refused to accept the invincibility of evil and brute power. These farmers, peasants and housewives took in Jewish refugees from all over Europe, risking their lives, and the lives of their families, to give protection to thousands of Jews fleeing the Nazis. This is a place where goodness happened.

Pastor Andre Trocme wrote the following in February, 1943:

*...in the course of the summer we have been able to help about sixty Jewish refugees in our own home; we have hidden them, fed them, plucked them out of deportation groups, and often we have taken them to a safe country You can imagine what struggles—with the authorities—what real dangers this means for us: threats of arrest, submitting to long interrogations...*

Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. p. 47

Magda Trocme, the pastor's wife, explained why the people of her community risked their lives to protect the Jews:

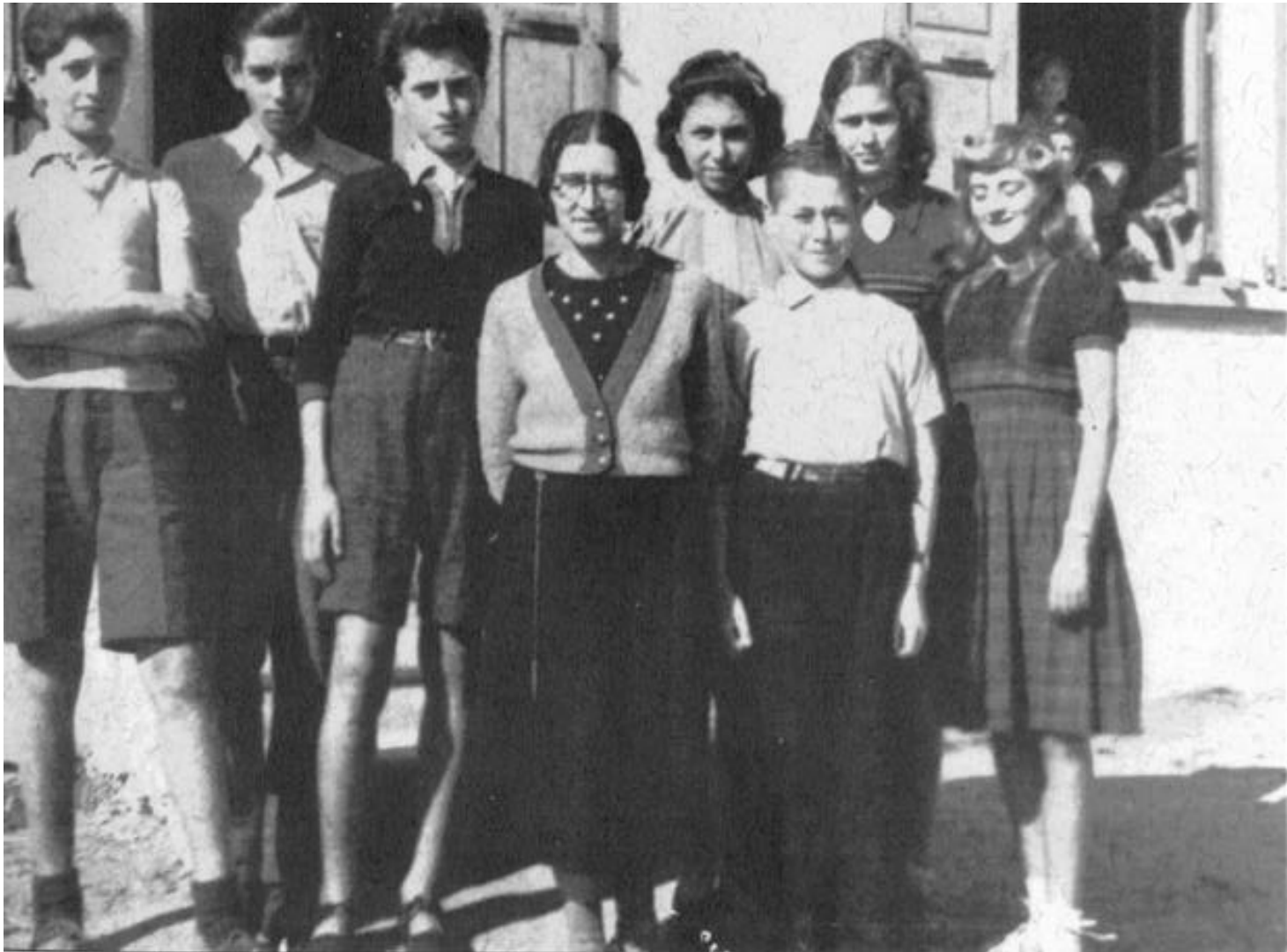
*Those of us who received the first Jews did what we thought had to be done—nothing more complicated... How could we refuse them?... The issue was. Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help!*

Carol Rittner and Sofia Myers, *Courage to Care*. p.102

Hanne Liebmann was one of those who was saved by the good people of Le Chambon.

*We came to Le Chambon, and we were received very wonderfully with a good meal, with stuff we hadn't seen in a long, long time... When the French came to round up Jewish people in August-September, 1942. ... we were hidden by farmers, they took care of us, they protected us. I don't think any of them were ever reimbursed. And food actually was very tight.. .Le Chambon was a very poor farming village, nothing much grows; so whatever they had, they shared with us. And if you are a family with small children and you take in one or two more mouths to feed, it is a sacrifice. And they didn't mind sacrificing, or even putting their lives at risk for us...*

William L. Shulman, *Voices and Visions*. p. 42-3



*Juliette Usach, a doctor who was in charge of the La Guespy children's home in Le Chambon sur Lignon, where Jewish children were cared for, was herself a refugee from the Civil War in Spain.*

*Photo Credit: Hanne Liebmann, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

# DENMARK

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## Izieu

Izieu was a remote farming village in the hills overlooking the Rhone River valley. It was the site of a farmhouse that was a refuge for Jewish children. Villagers protected the children, employed them, provided food and shelter when necessary. However, there were some villagers who were hostile. One day, in the spring of 1944, the Gestapo raided the farmhouse and according to the report of Klaus Barbie, the chief of the Gestapo in Lyons, "...in total 41 children, aged from 3 to 13 years, were captured. In addition the arrest of the entire Jewish staff, or 10 individuals, including 5 women, has taken place.. Transport to Drancy will take place on April 7, 1944."

Susan Zuccotti. *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*. p.1 96

*Of all the countries of Nazi-occupied Europe, only Denmark rescued virtually all its Jews. With their long tradition of tolerance toward the Jews, the Danes regarded the Jewish question rather than one of an isolated minority. Danish Jews were accepted and respected. They were regarded as Danes like any others. Denmark was invaded and occupied in 1940. „At first the Danes were allowed to run their country without a great deal of interference, and Danish Jews were not persecuted. But by 1943, even they were no longer exempt from the Final Solution. Plans for the deportation of Jews were leaked to Danish political leaders by their German sources.*

*The Danish response was quick. Fishermen, farmers, businessmen, taxi drivers, doctors and clergymen joined in a well-coordinated effort to spirit the Jews out of the country before they could be deported.*

Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know*, p. 157

The 7,220 Jews that were rescued were brought to Sweden.





*Group portrait of Danish-Jewish children living in a Swedish children's home, after their escape from Denmark.*

*Photo Credit: Frihedsmuseet, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

# ITALY

Italy's Jewish population was not endangered until late in the war. Approximately 85 percent of Italy's Jews survived the Holocaust. The reasons that the deportations began late in Italy are because the Germans did not occupy the country until 1943, and the danger period was shorter because liberation was earlier. The Jews were few in number (one tenth of one percent of the popu-

lation), therefore sympathetic Christians could give them shelter more easily than in other countries. Most importantly, Italy lacked a tradition of anti-Semitism. All of these factors, combined with the traditional Italian dislike for authority and their dislike for the Nazis in particular, led to an effort to rescue their Jewish fellow-countrymen and women.



*Class photograph of students at the San Leone Maggio Fratelli Maristi school in Rome. In the top row fourth from the right is Fred Flatau, a Jewish child who lived in hiding at this school in 1943-44. Photo Credit: Fred Flatau, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

# *Eastern Europe*

## **POLAND**

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A decree issued on October 15, 1941 by Hans Frank, Governor of the Generalgouvernement of German-occupied Poland, specified the death sentence for any Jews who moved outside their ghettos without authorization. The same death sentence applied to Christian Poles who knowingly helped Jews to hide or to move out of the ghetto.

*Jews who, without authorization, leave the residential district to which they have been assigned will be punished by death. The same punishment applies to persons who knowingly provide hiding places for such Jews.*

*Abettors and accomplices will be punished in the same way as the perpetrator, and an attempted act in the same way as an accomplished one. In less serious cases the sentence may involve penal servitude, or imprisonment.*

Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *A Holocaust Reader*, p. 67

Yad Vashem has recognized 5,134 Polish Christians as being Righteous Gentiles, the largest number in any country in occupied Europe. Yet the obstacles to Jewish rescue in Poland were the most formidable of any country. Jews were 10% of the population, forced into ghettos, isolated, starved, and randomly murdered. In the end they were to be systematically and totally eliminated. The Christian Poles themselves lived under severe oppression. The Germans killed many of the nation's political, religious and intellectual leaders, confined them in prisons and concentration or forced labor camps, where many perished. Approximately 1.8 to 1.9 million Christian Poles were murdered victims of German occupation policies and the war.

In the midst of that horror, there were those who risked their lives and the lives of their families to give aid and comfort to Jews.

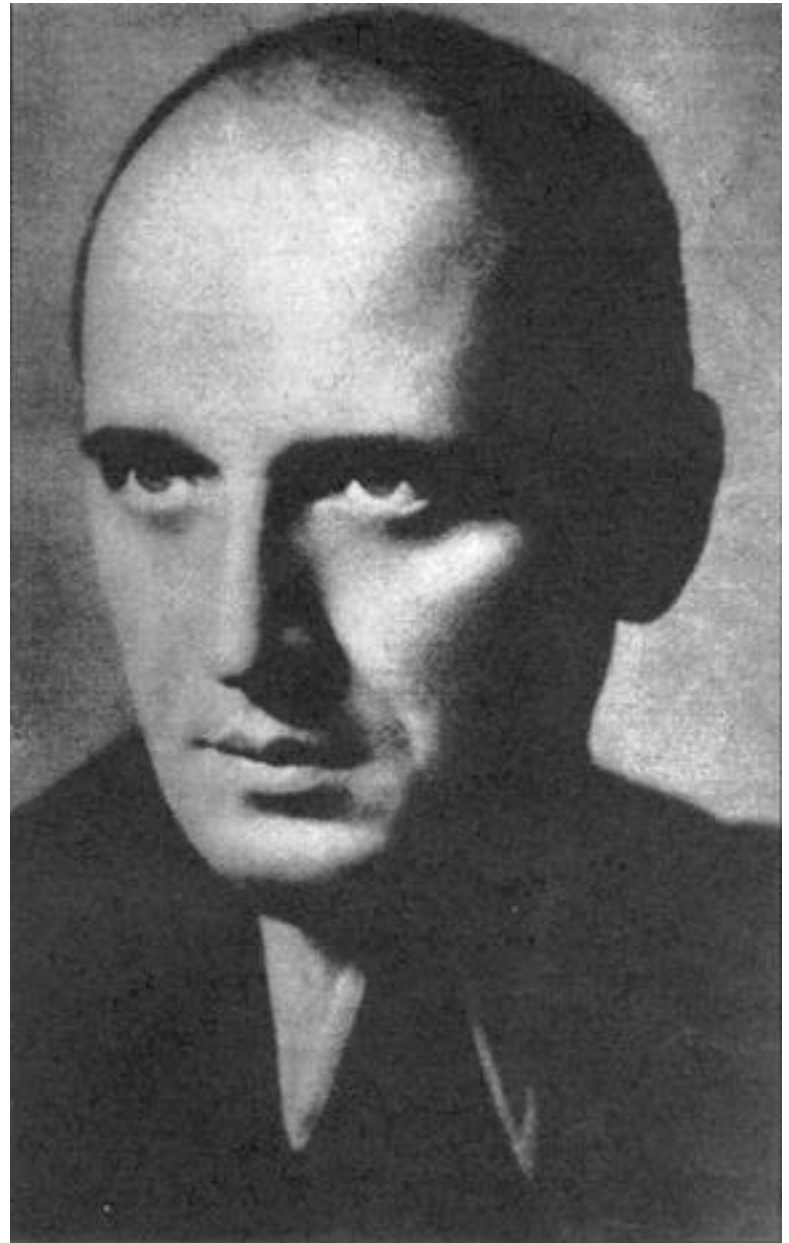


*A Jewish child in hiding stands among a group of Polish children dressed up for their First Communion.*

*Photo Credit: Eve Nisencwajg Bergstein, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

Pictured fifth from the left is Eve Nisencwajg (b. 1936), a Jewish child from Staszow, Poland, who was placed in the home of Stanislaw and Wiktona Szumielewicz in 1941. For the duration of the war, Eve posed as their orphaned niece. In 1946 members of the Jewish Brigade removed her to a Jewish orphanage in Krakow. Soon after, Eve was taken to a children's home in France, where she remained until emigrating to Canada in 1947.

Jan Zabinski (b. 1897) an engineer and a zoologist, saved many Jews in Warsaw. Cages in the Warsaw Zoo had been emptied of animals in September 1939 and Zabinski decided to utilize them as hiding places for fleeing Jews. Over the course of three years, hundreds of Jews found temporary shelter in these abandoned animal cages. In addition, close to a dozen Jews were sheltered in Zabinski's private home. His wife Antonia and son Ryszard helped in this undertaking. Jan and Antonia Zabinski were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in 1965.



*Photo Credit: Jewish Historical Institute, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.*

In the other countries of Eastern Europe it was equally difficult to engage in the humane task of rescuing the most endangered victims of Nazi persecution. However, in every country, there were those individuals who did so.

***Priest Aleksey Aleksandrovich  
Glagolyev and his family  
saved five Jews. He was  
Dean of the Polrovsky church.***

*Photo Credit: Babi Yap Society,  
courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*





*A false identification card issued by local church authorities to the Croatian Jew, Zdenko Bergl, who was then living in free confinement' with the Mitrani—Andreoli family in Modena, Italy, under the name of Luigi Bianchi. The identity card, which was issued after the armistice and the German occupation of Italy, registered his place of birth as Ban, a town in the part of Italy already under Allied control. Verification was therefore impossible.*

*Photo Credit:  
Zdenko Bergl, courtesy of  
USHMM Photo Archives*

Zdenko Bergl was born August, 1929 in St. Ivan Zabne in Croatia. He was the son of Nandor Bergl, a businessman, and Ilonka Bergl. Zdenko survived the war in hiding in Croatia and Italy. In August 1941 as a twelve-year old boy, Zdenko left his hometown and went into hiding in Susak, Croatia. He remained there for six months before fleeing over the border to Modena, Italy. He succeeded in securing false papers from the local church authorities and lived in 'free-confinement' with the Mitrani-

Andreoli family in Modena until September 1943. From Modena Bergl continued on to Florence where he stayed with the family of Neila Fussi until the end of the war in August 1944. Afterwards he resided in the Cinecitta DP camp in Rome. When he completed high school in September 1947 he moved to Lake Como, Italy. In 1949 he succeeded in obtaining immigration papers for the U.S. Bergl sailed from Naples to New York in November 1949 aboard the U.S. transport vessel Marine Jumper.



*A Jewish child in hiding poses with members of the Lithuanian family that concealed her. Pictured is the donor, Josephina Martul (right), and her daughter, Leonarda-Luisa (left).*

*Photo Credit: Rose Levin Weinberg, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

Rose Levin was born in Vilna in March 1941. When her father was killed by the Germans a few months later, her mother placed her with a Lithuanian family by the name of Martul. When her mother did not return after the war, Rose remained in the care of the Martuls until 1957, when an aunt from Canada located her and arranged for her emigration to Toronto.



# RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS

**These figures are  
based on material  
made available  
by Yad Vashem as of  
January 1,1998.**

*The underground movements in Denmark  
and Norway played a major role in the  
rescue of Jews in their countries. These  
two organizations have asked that no  
individual names be divulged.*

Poland	5,134
Netherlands	4,068
France	1,677
Ukraine	1,042
Belgium	954
Czech Republic and Slovakia	394
Hungary	393
Lithuania	390
Russia and Belarus	332
Germany	321
Italy	228
Greece	200
Yugoslavia (all countries)	180
Austria	80
Latvia	64
Romania	55
Albania	53
Switzerland	20
Moldava	19
Denmark*	14
Bulgaria	13
Great Britain	10
Norway*	7
Sweden	7
Armenia	3
Spain	3
Estonia	2
Brazil	1
China	1
Japan	1
Luxembourg	1
Portugal	1
Turkey	1
USA	1
<b>Total Persons</b>	<b>15,670</b>

# SUGGESTED READING

GAY BLOCK AND MALKA DRUCKER

***Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust***

Interviews with people from many countries who risked their lives to save Jews. The book includes an overview of the rescue efforts in each country covered.

HAROLD FLENDER

***Rescue in Denmark***

This book tells the story of the skill and daring of the Danes who hid the Jews of Denmark and later smuggled them to Sweden.

HOWARD GREENFIELD

***The Hidden Children***

A collection of experiences, as told by survivors, of Jewish children who were hidden during the Holocaust.

LEO GOLDEERGER, ED.

***The Rescue of the Danish Jews: Moral Courage Under Stress***

First-person accounts and reflections that explore the Danish choice to risk their lives to save the Jews.

PHILLIP HALLIE

***Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed***

A remarkable and inspiring story of the villagers in southern France who, led by their clergy, saved Jews.

PETER HELLMAN

***Avenue of the Righteous***

A collection of stories about Christians who saved Jews.

ELEANOR LESTER

***The Man in the Iron Web***

This work traces Raoul Wallenberg's life during the war.

HILLEL LEVINE

***In Search of Sugihara***

The story of Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat, who saved Jews from deportation and almost certain death.

MORDECAI PALDIEL

***Sheltering the Jews: Stories of Holocaust Rescuers***

Stories of the circumstances and odds facing the Jews inside Nazi-dominated Europe and those who would help them.

ALEXANDER RAMATI

***The Assisi Underground***

The story of the priests of the Italian town of Assisi who risked their lives to save Jews.

CAROL RITTNER AND SONDRRA MYERS

***The Courage to Care***

Short essays about rescuers and those they rescued from various countries, with historical commentary.

MAXINE ROSENBERG

***Hiding to Survive: Stories of Jewish Children Rescued from the Holocaust***

The stories of men and women from different countries who relate their experiences as "hidden children" and tell about their rescuers.

ERIC SILVER

***The Book of the Just: The Unsung Heroes Who Rescued Jews from Hitler***

This book tells the story of individuals who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

ANDRE STEIN

***Quiet Heroes: True Stories of the Rescue of Jews by Christians in Nazi Occupied Holland***

Seven tales of rescue, told in the words of the rescuers.

YUKIKO SUGIHARA

***Visas For Life***

The story of Yukiko Sugihara and her husband Chiune, one of the most important rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust.

NECHAMA TEC

***When Light Pierced the Darkness***

Based on her own experiences and extensive research. Nechama Tec describes what it was like to be both a rescuer and one who was rescued.

LENI YAHIL

***The Rescue of Danish Jewry***

The most authoritative work on the rescue of the Danish Jews.

## SELECTED VIDEOS

### ***As If It Were Yesterday***

85 minutes JHS and up

This film documents the heroism of people of Belgium who, during the German occupation, helped more than 4,000 Jewish children to hide or escape. often at the risk of their own lives.

### ***Assignment: Rescue, the Story of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee***

26 minutes JHS and up

In 3 weeks Varian Fry rescued 200 leading intellectuals from the Nazis.

### ***The Avenue of the Just***

55 minutes JHS and up

Interviews with men and women from many countries who saved Jews.

### ***The Courage to Care***

28 minutes JHS and up

A film about ordinary people who fed strangers, kept secrets, and provided hiding places at a time when most people “followed orders.”

### ***A Debt to Honor***

29 minutes JHS and up

The story of how thousands of Jews were rescued after the Germans occupied Italy in 1943.

### ***The Other Side of Faith***

26 minutes JHS and up

The story of how a Jew was saved by a Polish Righteous Gentile.

### ***It Was Nothing.. It Was Everything***

29 minutes JHS and up

The story of the rescue of Greek Jews

### ***Rescue in Scandinavia***

55 minutes JHS and up

The story of the courageous acts of Christian rescuers in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

### ***Weapons of the Spirit***

30 minutes JHS and up

The story of Le Chambon, the French village that saved the Jews who reached it.

### ***Zegota***

52 minutes

A documentary of Christian rescuers and Jewish survivors who recount their experiences in Poland.

# HOLOCAUST RESOURCE CENTER AND ARCHIVES

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*The Holocaust Resource Center and Archives was established to provide an educational resource for organizations and schools in the community. It is a non-taxlevy project of the Queensborough Community College Fund, Inc. made possible through the generosity of Donors.*

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