

# Rescuers, A Model for a Caring Community

*Notes to accompany the PowerPoint.*

Birmingham Holocaust Education Committee  
December 2009

## **Slide 1: TITLE SLIDE**

Rescuers are those who, at great personal risk, actively helped members of persecuted groups, primarily Jews, during the Holocaust in defiance of Third Reich policy. They were ordinary people who became extraordinary people because they acted in accordance with their own belief systems while living in an immoral society.

Righteous Gentiles is also a term used for rescuers. “Gentiles” refers to people who are not Jewish.

The most salient fact about the rescues was the fact that it was rare. And, these individuals who risked their lives were far outnumbered by those who took part in the murder of the Jews. These rescuers were even more outnumbered by those who stood by and did nothing.

Yet, this aspect of history certainly should be taught to highlight the fact that the rescuers were ordinary people from diverse backgrounds who held on to basic values, who undertook extraordinary risks.

The rescuers were people who before the war began were not saving lives or risking their own to defy unjust laws. They were going about their business and not necessarily in the most principled manner.

Thus, we ask the question: “what is the legacy of these rescuers that impact our lives and guide us in making our world a better place.”

## Slide 2

Dear Teacher:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp.

My eyes saw what no man should witness:

Gas chambers built by *learned* engineers,

Children poisoned by *educated* physicians,

Infants killed by *trained* nurses,

Women and babies shot and burned by *high school* and *college* graduates,

So I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

- Chaim Ginott, *Teacher and Child*

Haim G. Ginott (1922-1973) was a teacher, child psychologist and psychotherapist, who worked with children and parents. He pioneered techniques for conversing with children that are still taught today. In Epilogue to *Teacher and Child*, Ginott includes a copy of a letter that a principal sent to his teachers at the beginning of each new school year.

### ***Teacher and Child: Introduction by Alice Ginott (wife)***

Haim Ginott died aged 51 years old and his wife wrote about him:

“What is the goal of education?” he would ask, “When all is said and done, we want children to grow up to be decent human beings, a ‘mensch’, a person with compassion, commitment, and caring.”

### ***Teacher and Child: Preface***

I have come to the frightening conclusion: I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, a child humanised or dehumanised.

### ***Teacher and Child: Epilogue***

On the first day of the new school year, all the teachers in one private school received the following note from their principal. See slide.

### **Slide 3: UNIVERSE OF OBLIGATION**

*The circle of individuals and groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.*

In **circle 1**, write your name.

In **circle 2**, write in the people to whom you feel the greatest obligation – people for whom you'd be willing to take a great risk or put yourself in peril. (you don't have to write actual names)

In **circle 3**, write in the people who are on the next level. That is, people to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 2.

In **circle 4**, write in the people on the next level. Again, people to whom you have a bit of obligation, but not as great as in circle 3.

### **This is a good time to also discuss IDENTITY**

*How individual & national identities are formed and how these identities influence behavior and decision-making.*

**1. Create a personal identity chart.** Putting "ME" in the center, spider-off words and phrases that describe the way you see yourself.

**2. What factors shape our identity?** (brainstorm w/ class)

family, religion, language, gender, country of origin, experiences, age, economic status, geographic region, appearance, profession, education, marital status, sexual status, political affiliation, friends, hobbies, talents, travel, personality, social status, health, physical status, race

**3. How have you labeled yourself?**

Compare your chart w/ those of your classmates.

Which categories appeared on every chart, which on only a few?

As you look at other charts, is there something you want to change on yours?

How does your identity influence the choices you make?

Identities are constantly in flux. Discuss.

#### **Slide 4: PERSPECTIVES TRIANGLE**

The Holocaust is essentially a story of atrocity, destruction, and indifference, and any classroom exploration of rescue must be anchored in this reality. Overstating the prevalence of altruism or making it the focus of a unit on the Holocaust would give students an inaccurate picture of the history.

At the very least, however, rescue should be taught because it took place. Bystanders were the rule. Rescuers were the exception.

Less than ½ of 1% of the total non-Jewish population under Nazi occupation helped to rescue the Jews. Given that only a small fraction of non-Jews under Nazi occupation helped to rescue Jews, an overemphasis on heroic tales in a unit on the Holocaust can result in an inaccurate and unbalanced account of the history. Similarly, in exposing students to the worst aspects of human nature as revealed in the history of the Holocaust, you run the risk of fostering cynicism in your students. Accuracy of fact along with a balanced perspective on the history must be priorities for any teacher.

The phenomenon of rescue shows that, during the Holocaust, people had the ability to make choices. Given the extreme circumstances of German occupation, the decision to help Jews was not an easy one. Arguably, it was not the obviously moral one, since doing so often endangered the lives of one's family members. In acknowledging the fact that some individuals risked everything to save Jews, we should not straight away condemn those who chose to do so. We should simply recognize that, in the midst of severe hardship and peril, a range of choices did exist. As the rescuers - along with the perpetrators and bystanders - illustrate, these choices led to drastically different actions.

Contrary to the bystander and the perpetrator, the 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 the earlier stages of the persecution, but at some point there came a boundary they were not willing to cross.

Most rescuers were ordinary people. Most of them were not idealists who wanted to solve the world's problems, but human beings who cared about the people around them. In most 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.

In most cases it was the Jew who turned to the non-Jew for help. The bystander was faced with a situation in which he or she had to make an instant decision. This was usually an instinctive human gesture, taken on the spur of the moment, and only then followed by a moral choice.

The price the rescuer had to pay for their actions 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. Punishment was less severe in Western Europe. In Germany, strangely enough, there was no law against hiding Jews, and people mostly risked detention, though some of those caught were put in concentration camps. There are many documented cases of denunciations; demonstrating that German society in general was hostile. This increased the risk and made it more difficult for ordinary Germans to defy the conventions and rules of their society.

Thousands survived the Holocaust because of the daring of these rescuers. Although in total their number is statistically small, rescuers were all colossal people. Whether they saved a thousand people or a single life, those who rescued Jews during the Holocaust demonstrated the possibility of individual choice even in extreme circumstances. These and other acts of conscience and courage, however, saved only a tiny percentage of those targeted for destruction.

### **Slide 5**

*Some killed,  
others helped the killers,  
or made believe they didn't know.*

*The vast majority were apathetic,  
unconcerned,  
indifferent.*

*The victims died, not only because of the killers;  
They died because of the indifference of others.*

- Elie Wiesel, "The Courage to Care"

Throughout the Holocaust, the process of isolating, rounding up, transporting, and killing Jews depended on the collaboration of local populations. During the height of *Einsatzgruppen* activities in Eastern Europe, pogroms were even initiated by native groups who had behind them a long tradition of antisemitism and virulent Jew-baiting. In both the East and West, collaborators turned in Jews who had managed to avoid arrest or who had escaped from incarceration. Many others who were not active collaborators acquiesced in what they saw happening around them, shrugging their shoulders, telling themselves it was none of their business.

Others were indifferent or remained neutral, aiding neither the Nazis nor their victims. Or so they thought. But indifference only served the Nazi cause. The Nazis benefited from the inability of the Allies to take military steps to halt the murder of the European Jews when they first learned in the late summer 1942 of the Nazi intent for the "Final Solution" to its "Jewish Question" and the means that would be employed – gassing. The Roman Catholic Church, which had vigorously protested the Nazi euthanasia policy, did not speak out against the killing of Jews. The record of the United States' government is not unsullied either.

## **Slide 6: RESCUE (Breaker Slide: Demographics of Rescuers)**

There was no typical rescuer.

Rescuers were ordinary people who became extraordinary because they acted in accordance with their own belief systems while living in an immoral society.

## **Slide 7: DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESCUERS**

Although we speak of Righteous Gentiles as a distinct group of people, it is important to recognize the diversity of their backgrounds. Just as there is a danger of caricaturing the perpetrators and the victims of the Holocaust, there is a danger of doing the same to the rescuers. The truth is that these individuals varied a great deal. In addition to coming from every country the Germans occupied, rescuers came from all walks of life. They were different ages, social classes, education levels, economic spheres, political beliefs, and religious backgrounds. Among those who helped were farmers and diplomats, partisans and preachers, men and women, Christians and Muslims (there were Jewish rescuers as well, but our focus here is limited to Righteous Gentiles, i.e. non-Jews), teenagers and adults.

- The diversity of rescuers' backgrounds speaks to the idea of human potential. One did not have to be in a position of power or wealth. Nor did one need a perfect record of good behavior.
- Biography is not destiny. Unremarkable individuals became rescuers, and ordinary people became perpetrators. The message – one of empowerment and caution – is that one's background need not shape one's choices and actions. Rescue shows that individuals have the potential to transcend the expectations of their own biographies.

## **Slide 8: RESCUE (Breaker Slide: Traits of Rescuers)**

Despite their differences, rescuers drew on a reservoir of familiar traits in their efforts to save Jews.

### Most shared some of these character traits:

- They were individualists.
- They had a history of doing good.
- They were independent.
- They shared a “matter-of-fact” attitude, i.e. “It was the only thing I could do.”
- Their help given was not based on rational thinking.
- They had a universalistic perception of mankind. They did not see a Jew, they saw only a person needing help.
- Some rescuers were even antisemitic – statements like “I don’t like Jews, but I can’t kill them,” are not uncommon in accounts of rescue.

### We, too, can develop these traits.

Pointing out traits that rescuers exhibited – traits that are familiar and accessible today – can make their actions more resonant. Students are unlikely to face the difficulties and dilemmas that one encountered in trying to save a Jew in Nazi-occupied Europe. However, they do face countless situations that present hard choices: situations that test their character. The attributes that rescuers relied on are ones that individuals can cultivate and bring to bear in their own lives.

The question to ask is not, “If I were in their shoes, would I have acted the same way?” but rather, “How can I draw on their example today?”

Answering this question affirms the significance of the rescuers and honors their legacy. It shows that these men and women are not just heroes from the past, but also, role models for the present.

NOTE: The following slides describe the traits of rescuers. In the notes of each slide is the story of rescuers that demonstrate these qualities. The rescuers we have chosen were all ordinary people who did extraordinary things to save complete strangers.



### **Slide 9: MORAL LEADERSHIP**

The ability to influence others to accomplish a goal arising from a sense of right and wrong

*Background: Danish refugees register in Sweden after being rescued by the Danish people.*

### **Slide 10: GEORG FERDINAND DUCKWITZ**

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 member of the German legation in Copenhagen, 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.

All segments of the population went into action. Protests poured into the offices of the German authorities from Danish economic and social organizations, King Christian X expressed his firm objection to the German plans, the heads of the Danish churches published a strong protest and urged the public to help the Jews, and, the universities were shut down for a week, with the students lending a hand in the rescue operation. Within three weeks, 7,200 Danish Jews and another 700 non-Jewish relatives were taken to Sweden.

The operation was funded in part by the Jews themselves and in greater part by contributions from Danes. The Danish police not only refrained from collaborating with the Germans, but actually helped the Jews flee.

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 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.

Georg Duckwitz took the moral high ground to save the Danish Jews.

### **Slide 11: SELF-SACRIFICE**

Giving up personal wants and needs for the sake of others or for a cause.

*Background: Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Portuguese Consul-General at Bordeaux who helped save more than 10,000 Jews, with his family.*

### **Slide 12: IRENE GUT / POLAND / 1922-2003**

In a unique feat of heroism, Irene Gut Opdyke, 4ft 11in tall and not yet 30 years old, singlehandedly snatched dozens of Polish Jews from the closing clutches of the SS and saved them from the Nazi gas chambers. Unlike Oskar Schindler, she had no influence, no factory and no resources to back her. She relied on her exceptional looks, her warm heart and her limitless courage.

Irene Gut was brought up in Poland in a Catholic home that respected all people, gave aid to the needy, and did whatever needed to be done. As a very young girl, when she thought about her future, she always saw herself as self-sacrificing and lending assistance to others. She enrolled in a nursing school and in 1939, when the German army invaded Poland, volunteered to join a Polish army unit to care for the sick and wounded.

During one mission she was captured by Soviet soldiers, who beat and brutally raped her and left in the snow to die. She was discovered by a band of partisans and was taken to a Soviet hospital where she became an interpreter, although still a prisoner. In 1940 she escaped, but was soon arrested in a roundup by the Germans and sent as a slave laborer to a munitions factory.

It was here that Gut witnessed an event, which would transform her life. She saw a Nazi officer toss an infant into the air and shoot him like a bird. No longer able to stand by and watch the growing barbarism by the Germans, she became a participant in the fight to save the Jews from being slaughtered.

While working at the munitions factory, Irene caught the eye of a 70-year-old German Major, Edward Rugemer. Major Rugemer found her an easier job in the kitchen of a hotel for German officers. The kitchens were close to the walls of the local ghetto and each night she would gather leftover food and smuggle it through the barbed wire fences. Unbelievably, Gut went undetected for months.

Spurred by her success, Irene found a horse and buggy and, with an old priest, began to smuggle threatened Jews out of the ghetto and into the local forest. Throughout Poland the vast forests offered the only shelter to Jews on the run from the SS. Again and again she returned to the forests with food and blankets taken undetected from the German stores.

Major Rugemer soon promoted her to be his housekeeper in his villa. It had a large basement into which he never set foot. There she hid 12 Jews who had worked with her in the kitchens and in the laundry of the officers' hotel, and who were due for deportation to the gas chambers. By day, while Major Rugemer was away on his staff duties, they would come out of hiding to help her with the housework.

But as they were sweeping and polishing one day Rugemer came home unexpectedly early and found them. Immediately he went to call the SS, but before he could the call, Irene pleaded with him to save the lives of the Jews. Rugemer made a deal with her; their lives for her body. There was no way out for Gut. She became his mistress in order to save the Jews. They continued to live in the basement and had no knowledge of the agreement.

As a good Catholic girl she confessed to the local priest, who told her that her immortal soul was more important than anyone's mortal life. Her conscience could not accept this theology, and although she remained a Christian, she worshipped in her later years in Protestant churches.

As the Russian Army swept westward, towards Poland, Edward Rugemer left with the Germans before the Russians could overtake them. In early 1944, Gut and the Jews had fled into the forest where they stayed until the Russians gained control of Poland. They were then put in a "Displaced Persons" camp.

Every one of her protégées had been saved due to her bravery. Later, most of them found their way to the new State of Israel.

Three years later, Irene was able to obtain the papers, which allowed her to go to the United States. At the camp for "Displaced Persons" she was interviewed by William Opdyke, an American United Nations worker, and told him her story. By chance, Irene ran into him again in New York City and they were married shortly after. They raised a family and led a quiet life.

Twenty-five years later, as if by fate, Irene was asked to fill in as a speaker at her husband's Rotary Club. Up to then she had locked the past out her mind. Irene decided for the first time to speak about her past as a participant and eyewitness. In 1999, she wrote a book about her experience: "In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer." The book sold more than a million copies. For many years, she continued talking about her experiences traveling back and forth across the country.

In later years, the Israel Holocaust Commission named her one of the "Righteous among the Nations", a title given to those who risked their lives saving Jews from the Holocaust. She was presented with the Israel Medal of Heroes, the country's highest tribute at a ceremony at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. The Vatican also bestowed an honor on Gut.

Irene Gut ended her book with these words:

*"Sometimes, still, -often, still – I cannot see myself in the mirror; instead, as if through a haze, I see a baby thrown into the air. But I will myself to change this vision Something is thrown into the air, yes, but it is a bird, a little bird released from a cage, and it flies away, rising higher and higher over the treetops and roofs of the houses. A young girl leans out a window to scatter crumbs and watches this birth until it disappears from view. It is a little bird flying. A sparrow soaring. This is my will: to do right, to tell you, and to remember. Go with God."*

Irene Gut sacrificed herself to save the Jews.

### **Slide 13: COURAGE**

The state of mind that enables one to face danger, hardship or uncertainty with composure and resolve.

*Background Photo: The Emergency Rescue Committee office in Marseilles, L to R: Max Ernst, Jacqueline (Lamba) Breton, André Masson, André Breton and Varian Fry (in glasses)*

### **Slide 14: JAN / PIOTRKOW , POLAND**

The Piotrkow Ghetto, created in October 1939, was the first known ghetto to have been formed in occupied Poland.

It was October 1942, and Ruska Gutterman, 18, and her younger brother Benek, 16, fled from the Piotrkow Ghetto. Their parents and younger sibling stayed behind and were deported to Treblinka shortly thereafter. Ruska and Benek were both blessed with a light complexion and spoke Polish without a Yiddish accent. Their false identity papers and vague knowledge of Catholicism enabled them to pose as Catholic Poles.

Ruska and Benek were waiting for a train out of Piotrkow, when they realized it had been cancelled. It was about 10 pm and there would not be another train until 4 am. Soon the train station would be empty. If they did not find a hiding place, the Germans would catch them. Ruska was desperate. She noticed a railway worker leaving the station and thought he had a “kind face.” She took a chance and walked up to him. Ruska said she and Benek needed a place to spend the night since their train was not leaving until 4 am. It was against the law to be on the street.

The man took the children to his apartment. Ruska heard his wife and a baby in the next room. The wife asked, “Jan, what’s going on.” He answered, “It’s nothing...go back to sleep.” Jan told the children to go to sleep, that he would wake them in time for their train. Ruska was sure that he knew their true identity and would turn them in to the police.

Just before 4 am, Jan returned. He took the children to the street and Ruska noticed his trembling hands. Then Jan said, “My God. What they’re doing to your people...I can’t take it.” Ruska was right. Jan did know that she and Benek were Jewish. But he was risking his life to help them. “God be with you,” he said.

Ruska thanked Jan and offered him money for his help. He answered firmly, “No, you keep it. You’re going to need it a lot more than I will.” Ruska later remembered:

*I reached for his hand and kissed it, for there was no other way of expressing the great flood of gratitude I felt. In a world of enemies, this man – a total stranger – had given us our lives.*

Ruska and Benek escaped death that day and survived the war because a man name Jan had the courage to do what he knew was right.

## **Slide 15: INTEGRITY**

Firm adherence to a moral code, especially in the face of adversity.

*Background: 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*

## **Slide 16: DR. ADELAIDE HAUTVAL / FRANCE**

Dr. Adélaïde Hautval was a psychiatrist who lived in a Vichy-controlled area of southern France.

In April 1942, Hautval was told of the death of her mother, who had lived in occupied Paris. Wishing to attend her mother's burial, Hautval asked the German authorities for permission to enter the occupied zone. They refused and Hautval decided to risk crossing the demarcation line. The attempt failed, Dr. Hautval was captured by German police and transferred to the prison in Bourges.

In June 1942, Jewish prisoners wearing the yellow patch began to arrive at the prison. Hautval protested vigorously against the way they were treated, telling the guards, "The Jews are people like everybody else." Their answer was that from now on she would share their fate. Undeterred, Hautval pinned a piece of yellow paper to her clothes, saying, "Friend of the Jews."

In January 1943, after being in various detention in camps and prisons, Dr. Hautval was sent to the Birkenau death camp with another two hundred French women prisoners.

Hautval, a devout Protestant, was housed with five hundred Jewish women prisoners, and was nicknamed "the saint." Hautval, employed as a physician by the camp commander, refrained from reporting the prisoners' illness and thereby spared them immediate death. She treated Jewish patients with boundless dedication, and her gentle hands and warm words were of inestimable value to Jews in the hell of Auschwitz. "Here," she said, in words engraved on the prisoners' memory, "we are all under sentence of death. Let us behave like human beings as long as we are alive."

Eventually, Dr. Hautval was transferred to Block 10 of the Auschwitz I camp, where medical experiments were performed. She told Dr. Wirth that she would not be involved with his experiments and added that no person was entitled to claim the life or determine the fate of another. When forced to assist in the surgical sterilization of a young woman from Greece, Dr. Hautval told Dr. Wirth that she would never again attend such a procedure. When Wirth asked Dr. Hautval: "Don't you see that these people are different from you?" she replied, "In this camp, many people are different from me. You, for example."

She was later sent to Ravensbrück, where she managed to survive until the liberation. When she returned to France, her health had been permanently impaired.

On May 18, 1965, Yad Vashem recognized Dr. Adélaïde Hautval as a Righteous Among the Nations.

Dr. Adelaide Hautval maintained her integrity despite severe conditions and punishment.

### **Slide 17: COMPASSION**

A feeling of sympathy for the suffering of another and the desire to alleviate it.

*Background: Children rescued by villagers of Le Chambon.*

### **Slide 18: ELISABETH ABEGG / GERMANY**

Elisabeth Abegg, a Berlin school teacher and a believing Quaker, was dismissed in 1933 by the Nazi school director for her anti-Nazi views.

As the situation worsened for the Jews, Elizabeth contacted former students who were Jewish and invited them to gather in her home. Once a week, on Friday afternoons, she prepared a hot meal for these students and their friends. Regardless of the risks, the group met every week, and her apartment became a haven of warmth and a place where this group of friends planned life-saving strategies for each other.

As it became too dangerous for Jews to be on the streets of Berlin, Abegg began to make trips out of the city in search of hiding places. When money was needed for transportation and bribes to get Jews across the border into neutral Switzerland, she sold her own jewelry in order to finance the escapes.

Elisabeth Abegg was never arrested and was able to continue her activities until the end of the war.

Many years later, for Elisabeth Abegg's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, the people she had rescued, who were, by then, living all over the world, gathered in Berlin. They presented her with a book of memoirs that they had compiled called "A Light that Shines in the Darkness," and celebrated her birthday with her.

Elisabeth Abegg was awarded the title Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1967

Elisabeth Abegg showed compassion for persecuted Jews.

## **Slide 19: COOPERATION**

Working together toward a common goal or purpose.

*Background: Irena Sendler*

## **Slide 20: IRENA SENDLER / WARSAW, POLAND**

On October 12, 1940 - *Yom Kippur* - the Germans issued a decree calling for the establishment of a ghetto in Warsaw. About 400,000 Jews from the city and the surrounding region were forced to move into an area of 1.3 square miles. In mid-November, the ghetto was sealed. On account of the cramped conditions, poor sanitation, and very limited food and medicine, disease and starvation claimed thousands of lives each month.

In July 1942, mass deportations of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto began. Most were sent to Treblinka. Horrified by the Germans' persecution of the Jews, a group of Polish citizens formed an underground organization called the Council for the Aid to Jews, or *Zegota*, in September 1942. Irena Sendler became the head of *Zegota's* Children's Bureau. She obtained documents that allowed her to enter the ghetto, and she began to smuggle children out.

Irena and the members of *Zegota* led some children out through the underground corridors of a courthouse and through a tram depot. They sedated some infants and carried them out in potato sacks or coffins. A church located on the edge of the ghetto also became useful. It had two entrances, one inside the ghetto and one on the Christian side of Warsaw. With *Zegota's* help, some children entered the church as Jews and exited as "Christians."

In addition to smuggling children out of the ghetto, Irena Sendler found safe places for them to hide often with non-Jewish families in the Warsaw area. Children were also sheltered in convents, hospitals, and orphanages.

The Germans learned of Irena's activities. On October 20, 1943, she was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to the Pawiak prison. Irena was tortured brutally, but she refused to give any information about *Zegota* or about the children she had placed in hiding. She was sentenced to death. Members of *Zegota* bribed one of the Gestapo agents, and on the day Irena was to be executed, she was permitted to escape. She had to go into hiding for the remainder of the war but continued to coordinate her rescue work.

By January 1945, when Warsaw was liberated by Soviet troops, the Children's Bureau of *Zegota* had aided more than 2,500 Jewish children.

Irena Sendler died in Warsaw, Poland on Monday, May 12, 2008 at the age of 98.

Irena Sendler, in cooperation with *Zagota*, rescued more than 2,500 children from the Warsaw Ghetto.

## **Slide 21: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

A sense of obligation to ensure the welfare of others.

*Background: Jewish refugees at the gate, July 1940. Thousands of Jews lined up in front of the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, Lithuania, hoping to receive transit visas allowing them to escape to the Far East and to America or Palestine.*

## **Slide 22: UNKNOWN POLISH CHRISTIAN / BIALYSTOK, POLAND**

Bialystok, a city in northeastern Poland, was an important Jewish center and home to about 40,000 Jews (greater than 50% of the population). The Germans invaded on September 15, 1939 and transferred the city to the Soviets, as promised by the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

The Germans invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and 5 days later they retook control of Bialystok.

Immediately upon their arrival, the German policemen began to plunder Jewish shops, especially liquor stores. Around noon, the battalion commander gave the order to search the neighborhood around the synagogue and arrest all Jewish men. The search was conducted with extreme brutality and shootings. Doors were forced open. Jews were kicked and beaten, and their beards were set on fire. At the end of this part of the operation, there were at least 50 corpses strewn around.

More Jews were then brought to the marketplace. Some were taken to a nearby park or to a forest on the outskirts of town and shot. In spite of the ongoing killing, the number of assembled Jews increased steadily. Subsequently, someone proposed that the Jews be placed in the Great Synagogue, which stood just across from the marketplace, and that they be burned there. There had been no explicit order to do so – the idea was the result of one policeman’s suggestion, which was then adopted by the unit.

Some 500-700 Jews were forced into the Bialystok synagogue. The building was locked. It was doused with gasoline and set afire. The SS were shooting those who tried to escape from the front of the building. During the chaos, a Polish Christian, name unknown, who had been employed as a handyman at the synagogue, opened a small window at the back of the synagogue and several dozen Jews managed to escape. The others burned to death. June 27 became known as “Red Friday,” because on that day the *Einsatzgruppen* murdered over 2,000 Jews. (taken from *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* by Martin Gilbert)

Over the next two weeks, another 4,000 Jews were killed.

This unknown Polish Christian man felt a social responsibility to save anyone he could.



### **Slide 23: INGENUITY**

Inventive skill or cleverness in confronting a challenge.

*Background: Danish fishermen ferry a boatload of Jewish fugitives across a narrow sound to neutral Sweden during the nationwide rescue operation. News of impending deportations of Jews spawned a rapid response by the Danes, who worked feverishly to save Jewish citizens. Boats of every size and shape were used to transport the Jews from Denmark to Sweden, away from the grasp of the Nazis.*

### **Slide 24: LEOPOLD SOCHA / LVOV, POLAND**

Kristine Chigers was 7-years-old in May, 1943, just weeks before the Lvov ghetto's destruction, when her father and a group of friends, after secretly chipping away with forks and spoons, broke through the floor of a basement room in the ghetto and fled into the sewers. As they searched for a place that might be their 'home,' they were discovered by three Polish sewer workers. The three Poles could have easily handed them over to the Nazis for a reward of badly needed food. A cherubic-looking Pole named Leopold Socha was amused. He followed the diggers and raised himself up through the floor of the ghetto apartment. He beheld a defiant Jewish mother clutching two children closely to her chest. Deeply moved by the frightened youngsters, he broke out in a magnificent smile. Leopold Socha was not merely any sewer worker; he was Chief Supervisor of all of Lvov's sewers. He knew the best places to hide and how to lead prowling German inspectors in a direction away from clandestine Jews.

Socha promised Chiger that he would protect 21 Jews -- for a price. The Chigers provided the lion's share of the money, having stashed some cash and valuables away before the war. Socha brought whatever food he could each day, as well as news from a place called Earth. He gave them pages of newspapers and took their clothes home to clean each week. On Passover he provided potatoes.

Life in the sewers, although relatively safe from the Nazis, was no less perilous for the water that threatened to engulf the group following the winter thaw and spring rains. They were living in a functioning storm basin, which flooded to within inches of their lives. Kristine remembered how her mother held her aloft, her head pressed against the sewer's ceiling so that she could breathe. "This is it, we are going to die," she thought. "I developed a phobia about rain. I would sit and listen to hear if it was raining and panic as soon as I heard rain drops."

Yet obtaining fresh drinking water was so difficult -- it involved crawling through narrow drainpipes with a bucket gripped between the teeth. The Jews were forced to severely ration water to half a cup a day.

After living under inhuman conditions for several months, some left out of sheer madness. A newborn baby was smothered by its mother to save the lives of the others who trembled at the sound of his pitiful cries. This small group of Jews struggled to maintain some semblance of Jewish life in their underground hiding place. Yaakov Berestycki, a chassid, found a relatively clean place to put on tefillin each morning.

After several months the Chigers' money ran out. Socha told them such an enormous risk required compensation; that his two Polish friends could not be expected to assist him otherwise. They all wished each other goodbye and good luck. The following day a familiar shuffling of footsteps was heard. It was Socha! He became so committed to preserving their lives he saw no alternative but to use his own money. But he was concerned that his buddies, upon learning that the money was his, would back out of the rescue. So he asked Chiger to pretend he had found extra money and that it was really Jewish money they were being paid.

One day Socha revealed to the Jews his motive for rescue. He had been a convicted felon, spent considerable time in jail before the war. This mission was his way to show that he was a changed man and return to God.

In July 1944, after 14 months underground, Socha lifted the manhole cover, telling the Jews they were free! After months of darkness, their eyes were blinded by the sunshine. The original group of 21 now numbered only 10.

Months after liberation, Socha and his daughter were riding their bicycles in the street. A truck came careening in the direction of Socha's little girl. He steered quickly to knock her out of the way. Once again he saved a life -- his daughter's -- but Socha was killed, his blood dripping into the sewer.

Leopold Socha used his ingenuity to save Jews.

#### In Summary:

All of these traits are familiar and accessible today. Students are unlikely to face the difficulties and dilemmas that one encountered in trying to save a Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. However, they do face countless situations that present hard choices; situations that test their character. The attributes that rescuers relied on are ones that young people can cultivate and bring to bear in their own lives.

The question to ask is not, "If I were in their shoes, would I have acted the same way?" but rather, "How can I draw on their example today?" Answering this question affirms the significance of the rescuers and honors their legacy. It shows that these men and women are not just heroes from the past, but also role models for the present.

**Slide 25: RESCUE (Breaker Slide: Motivation of Rescuers)**

**Slide 26**

*Let us not forget there is always a second  
when the moral choice is made.*

*Even in those times, when the terror was unprecedented. German soldiers everywhere,  
collaborators everywhere.*

*Even then, there were people: men, women, rich and poor,  
who simply said “NO” – we won’t do it.*

- Elie Wiesel, “Courage to Care”

Given the extreme circumstances of the German occupation, the decision to help Jews was not an easy one. Arguably, it was not the obviously moral one, since doing so often endangered the lives of one’s family members.

In acknowledging the fact that some individuals risked everything to save Jews, we should not straight away condemn those who chose not to do so. We should simply recognize that, in the midst of severe hardship and peril, a range of CHOICES did exist. These CHOICES led to drastically different actions.

**CONNECTIONS:**    We have the ability to make choices.

Individuals have the capacity to make decisions and to act on them.

The individuals who planned and carried out the genocide of European Jewry made decisions to take part. Those who rescued Jews also made choices, as did the bystanders who neither harmed nor helped.

### **Slide 27: WHAT MOTIVATED RESCUERS?**

- ❖ Some sympathized with the Jews.
- ❖ Some were actually antisemitic, but could not sanction murder or genocide.
- ❖ Some were bound to those they saved by ties of friendship and personal loyalty, while some went out of their way to help total strangers.
- ❖ Some were motivated by their political beliefs or religious values.
- ❖ Some felt ethically that life must be preserved in the face of death.
- ❖ For some there was no choice, what they did was natural and instinctive.

*Many rescuers felt they were simply acting out of elemental human decency. They later insisted that they were not heroes, that they never thought of themselves as doing anything special or extraordinary.*

### **Slide 28: MARION PRITCHARD QUOTE**

Marion Pritchard obtained “Aryan” identity cards for Jewish students, locating hiding places, and helped Jews move into them. She supplied food, clothing, and the all-important ration cards. She registered Jewish babies as Christians and helped provide medical care. She did not regard her acts as heroic.

*It did not occur to me to do anything other than I did. After what I had seen outside the children's home, I could not have done anything else. I think you have a responsibility to behave decently. We all have memories of times we should have done something and didn't. And it gets in the way of the rest of your life.*

Her parents imbued her with a strong conviction that “we are our brother's keepers,” she said. “When you truly believe that you have to behave in that way in order to be able to live with yourself.”

### **Slide 29: RESCUE (Breaker Slide: Methods of Rescue)**

#### **Slide 30: METHODS OF RESCUE**

First, a rescuer had to recognize that a person was endangered, something that was not always clear because of the propaganda and the secrecy of the Nazis.

Second, rescuers had to decide whether or not to assume the responsibility of helping and risk the potential consequences. Public hangings, deportation to concentration camps, and on-the-spot shootings were very real consequences of helping enemies of the Third Reich.

Third, the rescuers had to take action. Sometimes the entire transformation from bystander to rescuer took just seconds, and in certain cases, was not even a conscious decision.

#### **Slide 31: RESCUE (Breaker slide: Individuals who Rescued)**

Throughout German-occupied Europe, thousands of individuals risked their own lives to help Jews. Rescue took many forms. Some rescuers acted on their own; others worked in cooperation with family, neighbors, and friends. Entire communities took the responsibility of sheltering Jews, and in some cases entire nations rallied to prevent the deportation of its Jewish citizens.

#### **Slide 32: INDIVIDUALS WHO RESCUED**

When citizens stood by and did nothing, Jews were murdered; however, when citizens took it upon themselves to act as rescuers, Jews had a chance.

##### **Irena Sendler (Sendlerowa)**

Irena Sendler was the director of the Children's Bureau of *Zegota*, a unit within the Polish underground established to help Jews in hiding. As a health worker, she had access to the Warsaw Ghetto and led hundreds of Jewish children out of the ghetto to safety. Some of the children were sedated and carried out in potato sacks; others in coffins. Still others entered a church in the ghetto that had 2 entrances. One entrance opened into the ghetto, the other into the Aryan side of Warsaw. Children entered the church as Jews and exited as Christians. When the Germans became aware of her activities, she was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo. Irena was tortured but refused to betray either her associates or any of the Jewish children in hiding. She was sentenced to death but was saved at the last minute when *Zegota* members bribed the Germans to halt the execution. She escaped from prison, assumed a new identity and continued her work for *Zegota*. Sendler was pursued by the Gestapo for the rest of the war.

By 1943, in addition to those in private homes, the Children's Bureau found homes for 600 children in public and religious institutions. Over time, some 2,500 children were registered by the Warsaw branch of *Zegota*.

## Oskar Schindler

Oskar Schindler: drinker, womanizer, gambler, profiteer, briber, wheeler-dealer, Nazi. Not the description of a saint, yet he saved more than 1,000 Jews.

After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Schindler took charge of an enamelware factory in Krakow, Poland that made mess kits and field kitchenware for the German army. The contracts he received from the German army brought in big profits. He settled into an upscale lifestyle with a mistress. He dealt cleverly on the black market acquiring luxuries such as silk, furniture, jewelry, clothing and liquor -- some for himself and some to seduce Nazis in high places.

The Nazi brutality and killing of Jews enraged Schindler, who was himself a Nazi. When he took over the Krakow factory it had only 45 workers. As contracts came in, the number grew to 125. His accountant, Itzhak Stern, was a Jew. Stern asked him to hire his Jewish friends and soon there were 150 Jewish employees.

In the spring of 1941, when the Nazis ghettoized the Jews of Poland, Schindler's plant became a haven for Jews. His employees could go in and out of the ghetto to work.

Sometime later, Schindler made a deal with the Germans to enlarge his factory, adding production of anti-tank shells. He even added a night shift to take on even more Jews.

By 1942, Schindler's factory employed 550 Jews, for whose labor he paid the SS a fixed rate of so much per day per person. In the fall, Schindler traveled to Budapest to give Jewish leaders the first full-scale report of the horrors occurring in Poland.

In March 1943, the ghetto of Krakow was closed. Those who could work were marched to the nearby forced labor camp of Plaszow. The others were either shot or shipped to Auschwitz. Schindler had been assured that his workers, now living in Plaszow, would arrive on time. But it was never so. He came up with a bold idea – build a sub-camp where his workers could live in his own factory yard. He would feed the Jews at his own expense and pay the cost of the building. The Plaszow commander was thrilled to be able to make room in his camp.

Six new barracks were built to house 1,200 people. Most importantly there were no SS. No one died of overwork or beatings.

In April 1944, the Soviets were moving west on the offensive. The SS was emptying the death camps and destroying all traces. Plaszow was to be closed and Schindler's sub-camp as well. The prisoners would go back to Plaszow to await "relocation." Schindler knew what that word meant – extermination. He would not give in.

He asked to move his factory west to Czechoslovakia and take his skilled workers with him. It was accepted. Schindler began preparing a list of people to be moved to the new plant – a "Schindler's List". The new camp had been built at tremendous cost to Schindler, yet now he had no intention of producing anything useful for the Nazis.

In mid-October 1944, 800 men and 300 women (who came later on a train) boarded freight cars. Unfortunately, the women's car had accidentally gone to Auschwitz. These *Schindlerfrauen*, as

they were called, spent weeks in Auschwitz until Schindler bribed their way out with liquor, hams and diamonds.

On May 7, 1945, news of the German surrender was heard. Afraid of the approaching Soviets, Schindler and his wife dressed in prisoner stripes, and eight Jews volunteered to travel with them to protect them. They carried a letter attesting to the record of Schindler's good deeds. Schindler was given a farewell gift of a ring made of gold from the bridgework of a Jewish prisoner. On it was inscribed the Talmudic verse: *Whoever saves a single soul, it is as if he saved the whole world.*

Eventually, Schindler found safety with the American forces. Everything he owned was confiscated by the Soviets. He was penniless. But his "family" – the *Schindlerjuden* (Schindler's Jews) – would care for him the rest of his life. In 1974, he died in Germany and at his request, was buried in the Latin Cemetery in Jerusalem.

Schindler is responsible for saving more than 1,000 Jewish lives.

### **Miep Gies**

During the Nazi occupation of Holland, this Austrian-born Dutch woman risked her life daily to hide Anne Frank and her family from the Nazis. For more than two years, Miep helped the Franks and four other people evade the Gestapo by bringing food, comfort and news of the world to their tiny hideout in the canal-side building that housed the family business.

It all ended on August 4, 1944, when their hiding place was betrayed and the family was arrested by the Nazis. A few hours later, wandering mournfully through the four small upstairs rooms, Miep discovered the plaid, cloth-covered diary kept by young Anne.

By saving the diary from the debris left by the Nazis, Miep Gies made sure that Anne Frank's name was known around the world. After the Bible, it is the most widely read book in the world - for many children, their first direct brush with the horrors of the Holocaust.

### **Corrie Ten Boom**

During the Second World War, the Ten Boom home became a hiding place for fugitives and those hunted by the Nazis. By protecting these people, Casper and his daughters, Corrie and Betsie, risked their lives. This non-violent resistance against the Nazi-oppressors was the Ten Booms' way of living out their Christian faith. This faith led them to hide Jews, students who refused to cooperate with the Nazis, and members of the Dutch underground resistance movement.

In February 1944, the Gestapo arrested Corrie ten Boom, her father, her brother (Willem) and two sisters (Betsie and Nollie), and other family members for their rescue efforts. After holding them briefly in the penitentiary in Scheveningen, a seaside town close to The Hague, the Gestapo released all but three of the ten Boom family members: Corrie ten Boom, her older sister Betsie, and her father Casper remained in prison. Casper ten Boom became sick in prison and died in a hospital corridor only ten days after the arrest. The sisters remained in the Scheveningen prison until June 1944, when officials transferred them to an internment camp at Vught, in the Netherlands. In September 1944, the Nazis deported Corrie and Betsie ten Boom to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. In Ravensbrück, the sisters managed to stay together until Betsie died that December.

The camp administration released Corrie ten Boom in late December 1944. She traveled across Germany by train until she reached the Netherlands, where she reunited with surviving members of her family.

Corrie Ten Boom documented her experiences in *The Hiding Place*.

### **American Friends Service Committee (Quakers)**

The Quaker movement, also called the Society of Friends, was founded in England during the middle of the 17th century. The group took its name from the "quaking" that is sometimes associated with the agitation of religious feeling. The early Quakers were often persecuted, fined and put in jail for violating religious and civil laws. They refused to attend established churches, to take oaths of office, to pay tithes, or to bear arms. They insisted on holding meetings of their own and in proselytizing even where it was forbidden.

During and after World War I the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a U.S.-based Quaker aid society, was instrumental in providing relief services in Germany and later throughout Europe. These activities created a great deal of good will in Germany and elsewhere. In the early years of the Nazi regime, AFSC activities on behalf of refugees were limited. This has been attributed to the dilemma faced by Quakers who feared that speaking out against the persecution of Jews would compromise their reputation in Germany, which they had built up over many years. After *Kristallnacht*, the AFSC became more active in the refugee cause. In 1939, they championed the ultimately unsuccessful Wagner-Rogers Bill that was introduced in the U.S. Congress to permit one-time entry of 20,000 children (under the age of 14) above the quota limit for German immigrants.

The AFSC supported many groups who helped refugees -- primarily Jewish children -- resettle from Europe to the United States. The actions of the AFSC showed that interfaith activity on behalf of European Jews could be successful.

### **Pastor Andre Trocmé**

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon is a small village in the mountains of southern France. Most of the people of the village are Huguenots, or French Protestants. The Huguenots had long been a minority in France, which is mainly Catholic. As a result, they often were the victims of persecution themselves. Perhaps their own persecution explains why the Huguenots in this small village could not turn away the Jews who came to them for help.

The religious leader of Le Chambon was Pastor Andre Trocmé. He and his wife, Magda, organized a network to hide Jews & to get them out of France, appealing to Catholics and Protestants to help.

Jewish children whose parents had been deported were hidden in children's homes in the region. One of the homes was run by Daniel Trocmé, a second cousin of the Pastor. In June 1943, the Gestapo rounded up the children, arrested Daniel and sent him to Majdanek. Some Jewish children survived and reported that Daniel had been gassed and incinerated in April 1944. It was the Gestapo's only successful raid on Le Chambon.

Most of the Jews did not stay in hiding, but were smuggled into Switzerland or Spain.

The people of Le Chambon saved over 5,000 Jewish men, women and children.



### **Slide 33: RESCUE (Breaker slide: Diplomats who Rescued)**

### **Slide 34: DIPLOMATS WHO RESCUED**

Of the over 22,000 people recognized by Yad Vashem as “Righteous Among the Nations,” only 9 were diplomats, but their actions were decisive in the saving of tens of thousands of Jews. Six of the nine are represented here.

#### **Dr. Feng Shan Ho**

Dr. Feng Shan Ho was one of the first diplomats to save Jews by issuing them visas to escape the Holocaust. He was responsible for saving thousands (estimated 18,000) of Jews in Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938 and 1939.

Following the *Anschluss* in March 1938, all foreign embassies and legations in Austria were closed. In May 1938, Ho was appointed the Chinese Consul General in Vienna (served 1938-1941). The legation staff was reduced to Consul General Ho and one subordinate.

With the German takeover, Austrian antisemitism erupted in full force. The Jews of Austria were increasingly in danger. Less than a month after the annexation, the first Austrian Jews were deported to Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps. They were told that if they emigrated immediately, they would be released.

Many Jews wanted to go to the United States, but even though the U.S. had not filled its Austrian quota, it imposed stringent emigration restrictions. Those who wished to go Palestine found that Britain, under Arab pressure, had severely reduced the quota for Jewish emigrants. The plight of Austrian Jews was further exacerbated by the Evian Conference, which made it evident that none of the 32 participating nations was willing to open its doors to Jewish refugees.

Vienna became the center for emigration of Austrian Jews. All foreign consulates in the city were besieged by desperate Jews, but most did not offer help. The British consulate posted a sign saying no visas would be issued; the French would not accept any visa applications; the Swiss demanded that passports be stamped with the red "J" in order to bar them from crossing the border.

The “means” Consul General Ho used to help Jewish refugees was to issue them visas to Shanghai, China. Shanghai, which was under Japanese occupation, did not require a visa for entry, but a visa – as proof of destination – was necessary for Jews to leave Austria. Ho knew that Chinese visas to Shanghai were actually used as means for people to get to the U.S., England and other destinations.

Consul General Ho practiced a “liberal” visa policy, authorizing the issuing of visas to any and all who asked. Having been turned down by many consulates, Jews soon discovered that they could get visas at the Chinese Consulate. For the next 2 years, the compassionate Chinese Consul General in Vienna issued visas to any and all Jews who requested them. After exhausting their supply of official forms, they even used ordinary paper stamped with the consular seal.

In 1973, after 4 decades in the diplomatic service, Feng Shan Ho retired to San Francisco. Once he had retired, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan launched a political vendetta to discredit Ho

publicly with false allegations of a petty misappropriation of funds at his last posting. Ho presented evidence of his innocence, but it was futile. The real reasons behind this political vendetta were never revealed. Ho was denied a pension for his 40 years of service to China, and more than 2 decades later, his name has not been cleared.

Why was Feng-Shan Ho willing to help the Jews of Austria when most others would not? His reason was simple: "I thought it only natural to feel compassion and to want to help. From the standpoint of humanity, that is the way it should be."

### **Aristedes de Sousa Mendes**

After the Nazis had invaded France and began deportations of the Jews, thousands sought refuge. Many were helped by the Portuguese Consul-General at Bordeaux, Aristedes de Sousa Mendes. Nearly 100,000 Jews in the area had but one desire – to escape to Spain and into Portugal, a neutral country. But the Portuguese government refused to grant entry visas to any refugees, especially to Jews.

Mendes could not close his eyes. He took a great many Jews into his own home and thousands of others lined up outside, hoping the visa policy would change. On his own volition, Mendes decided to grant visas to all, even at risk of losing his position. He sat down in front of his house and for 3 days stamped visas for thousands of Jews. His government learned of this and in a rage ordered him back to Portugal.

Mendes saved the lives of more than 10,000 Jews. For defying orders, his government stripped him of his post and his right to practice law. Though he had a family of twelve children, Mendes said afterward that he had no regrets; he was proud of what he did:

*If thousands of Jews can suffer because of one Catholic (he meant Hitler), then surely it is permitted for one Catholic to suffer for so many Jews. I could not act otherwise. I accept everything that has befallen me with love.*

Mendes died in poverty in 1954.

### **Chiune (Sempo) Sugihara**

Sugihara was the Japanese Consul to Kovno, Lithuania. Several thousand Jews who had fled Nazi-occupied Poland were left stranded in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. Realizing that Lithuania would soon be occupied by the Nazis as well, the Jews sought freedom in other countries. Sugihara wanted to help. Japan, now allied with Germany, did not want to get involved. Sugihara realized that he could supply the Jews with Japanese visas, legitimately or otherwise, but these would be transit visas only and the holder would still need to declare a final destination. Curacao, a Dutch possession in the Caribbean, was suggested by the Dutch Consul in Lithuania who had obtained a written statement saying no visa would be required to enter the colony. With Japanese transit visas, the Jews could get to Curacao.

Sugihara began issuing visas on his own accord, working day and night. The Soviet government announced its plans to close the Japanese consulate in Lithuania. Sugihara continued to sign and stamp Japanese transit visas until the moment of his departure. According to some witnesses, he threw blank, stamped forms from his train window even as his train pulled away from the station.

Defying his government, Sugihara granted visas to as many applicants as possible – at least 3,500. The Japanese government cited him for insubordination and stripped him of his post. He died in Japan in relative obscurity.

In Japan, the Jews were treated without discrimination. When their transit visas expired, they were allowed to leave Japan and go to Shanghai, China to wait out the war. Curacao, it turned out, was closed to them. After the war, some returned and settled in Japan.

### **Jan Zwartendijk**

Jan Zwartendijk from Rotterdam, Holland represented the Philips Corporation in Lithuania. A few days before the Soviet occupation (June 1940), he became Acting Consul for the Netherlands.

A few Dutch Jews turned to their diplomatic representatives for help in obtaining a visa to somewhere close to the U.S. Investigations revealed that visas were not required for the Dutch-controlled Caribbean Islands of Surinam and Curacao since entry to them was rarely granted and if granted, permission would be given by the local governor.

Zwartendijk knowingly wrote a half-truth into Jewish passports saying that visas were not required to enter those islands. He failed to mention that entry was nearly impossible. These visas enabled refugees to purchase a train ticket across the Soviet Union and survive the war in Japan or in Shanghai. No one ever attempted to get to the Dutch Islands.

### **Harry Bingham**

Bingham came from an illustrious family. His father (on whom the fictional character Indiana Jones was based) was the archeologist who unearthed the Inca City of Machu Picchu, Peru, in 1911. Harry entered the U.S. diplomatic service and, in 1939, was posted to Marseilles, France as American Vice-Consul.

The U.S. was then neutral and, not wishing to annoy Marshal Petain's puppet Vichy regime, President Roosevelt's government ordered its representatives in Marseilles not to grant visas to any Jews. Bingham found this policy immoral and, risking his career, did all in his power to undermine it.

In defiance of his bosses in Washington, he granted over 2,500 U.S. visas to Jewish and other refugees, including the artists Marc Chagall and Max Ernst and the family of the writer Thomas Mann. He also sheltered Jews in his Marseilles home and obtained forged identity papers to help Jews in their dangerous journeys across Europe. He worked with the French underground to smuggle Jews out of France into Franco's Spain or across the Mediterranean and even contributed to their expenses out of his own pocket. In 1941, Washington lost patience with him. He was sent to Argentina, where later he continued to annoy his superiors by reporting on the movements of Nazi war criminals.

Eventually, Bingham was forced out of the American diplomatic service completely. Bingham died almost penniless in 1988. Little was known of his extraordinary activities until his son found some letters in his belongings after his death. He has now been honored by many groups and organizations including the United Nations and the State of Israel.

## **Raoul Wallenberg**

Raoul Wallenberg came from a wealthy Swedish banking family. Sweden was one of the few European countries that were neutral during World War II. As a young man he worked at a family bank in Haifa, Palestine and met refugees from Germany who told him about the sufferings of the Jewish people. From that moment on, he felt deep empathy for them.

In 1938, after invading Austria, Hitler applied enormous pressure on the Hungarian monarchy. The government appeased Hitler with some anti-Jewish decrees. When World War II began in 1939, Hungary joined Germany as an ally. Hitler let her retain her “independence” and let her troops take over some of the territories lost after World War I. Still, the Hungarian government avoided joining in on the “Final Solution.” Thousands of desperate Jews from Nazi occupied Poland, Czechoslovakia and other areas crossed into “independent” Hungary in hope of shelter.

By 1943, 800,000 Jews were in Hungary and the Nazis demanded they be surrendered for deportation. The Hungarian government stalled until March 1944 when Hitler forced the issue and sent in troops to occupy the country. The existing government resigned and a Nazi “puppet” regime took over. It issued sweeping anti-Jewish decrees, set up ghettos, and began deportation. Adolf Eichmann was the SS officer in charge.

By 1944, almost half a million Hungarian Jews had already been deported to the death camps in Poland. Another 250,000 were still in the ghettos of Budapest awaiting forced removal to their terrible fate. At about the same time, Raoul was approached by certain influential people to gain his assistance. In the spring of 1944, the Swedish government sent Wallenberg as a special envoy with diplomatic protection. His mission was to help the Jews of Hungary. The Swedes, the surviving Hungarian Jews and the War Refugee Board of the U.S. all provided funds for Wallenberg’s mission.

Wallenberg reached Budapest (the capital) in July. He immediately began to help the remaining Jews receive food and medical care. He also gave out specially designed passports and other papers to about 16,000 Jews, putting them under Swedish protection. Thousands of lives were saved this way and Wallenberg acquired the title of “Angel of Rescue.” To further refine his rescue missions, he purchased several buildings in Budapest. Due to his persistence, the buildings were granted extraterritorial rights similar to an embassy. At one point these buildings provided refuge to more than 5,000 Jews. Among his many feats were the establishment of hospitals, medical care centers, orphanages, and soup kitchens for the rescued.

About 144,000 Jews survived in Budapest. Wallenberg is credited with saving approximately 70,000. They were the only Jewish community of considerable size left in Europe.

Wallenberg’s story, however, has a tragic ending. It is thought that the Communist leaders thought Wallenberg was an American spy because he had taken money from the U.S. War Refugee Board. They couldn’t fathom why a Swede would be doing this. He was arrested and sent to a Siberian prison. He was never seen again. The Soviet government refused to tell Wallenberg’s family or the Swedish government exactly what happened to him. To this day, his fate remains a mystery.

NOTE: The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum is located at 100 Raoul Wallenberg Plaza in Washington, D.C.

## **Slide 35: RESCUE (Breaker Slide: Governments that Rescued)**

### **Slide 36: GOVERNMENTS THAT RESCUED**

#### **Bulgaria**

Starting in March 1943, Jews in Bulgarian-occupied zones were deported as a result of German pressure. But when the deportation order came for the Jews of pre-war Bulgaria, there was an outcry from the Bulgarian people, including many Orthodox church leaders. Even King Boris III intervened. As a result, all Jews in custody were released, and the deportation order was rescinded. Bulgaria was the only country in Europe whose local Jewish population in 1945 was larger than it had been before the war.

#### **Denmark**

Initially, the German occupation of Denmark was one of mutual cooperation. After the Germans declared martial law in August of 1943 and revealed their intentions to deport the Jews of Denmark, the public, the churches, and even King Christian X voiced their opposition. In anticipation of the forthcoming deportations, the citizens of Denmark organized a massive rescue effort, ferrying the endangered Jews across the sea to neutral Sweden. When the Germans began searching for Jewish deportees, they found only 500 Jews, mostly old people that were too frail to make the sea journey. These Jews were sent to Theresienstadt where the Danish authorities continued to monitor their safety. As a result, most survived the war. The Danish Jews who had been ferried to Sweden survived and even returned to find their homes and jobs waiting for them.

Note: According to popular legend, King Christian X of Denmark chose to wear a yellow star in support of the Danish Jews during the Nazi occupation. In another version, the Danish people decided to wear a yellow star for the same reason. In fact, unlike Jews in other countries under Nazi rule, the Jews of Denmark were never forced to wear an identification mark such as a yellow star. However, the legend conveys an important historical truth: both the King and the Danish people stood by their Jewish citizens and were instrumental in saving the overwhelming majority of them from Nazi persecution and death.

#### **Finland**

Before and during World War II there was almost no antisemitism in Finland, in fact, the Finnish Government refused to condone the Nazis' anti-Jewish platform. When the Soviet Union attacked Finland in 1939, the country's Jews joined the army to fight the Soviets. In 1941, Germany deployed troops to northern Finland and Finland joined Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union. Some 300 Jews served in the Finnish army fighting with the Germans.

In mid-1942, when SS Chief Heinrich Himmler requested that the Finnish government hand over its Jewish community, the Finns refused. Prime Minister Johann Wilhelm Rangell stated that the country had but 2,300 respected Jewish citizens and the issue was closed to discussion. The Germans did not press the issue, as they were afraid to lose Finnish cooperation against the Soviets.

Later that year, Gestapo Chief Heinrich Muller convinced the head of the Finnish State Police to deport Jewish refugees. Undertaken in secret, the deportation plan was discovered by the Finnish cabinet, which manages to stop it from being fully implemented. Nevertheless, eight Jews were handed over to the Germans. Ultimately, only one of the eight survived. Many clergymen and

politicians condemned the deportation, and as a result, the Finnish government refused to surrender any more Jews to the Germans.

Apart from that one incident and those Finnish Jews who died on the battlefield, the Jews of Finland, both local and refugees, went through the war unharmed. The Finns did, however, hand-over to the Germans Soviet soldiers taken prisoner during the winter war in 1940 as part of scheme to exchange prisoners. Among them were Jews who perished in German custody.

In the winter of 1944, the Finns began fighting the Germans, and successfully expelled German forces from Finland.

### **Hungary**

Hungary joined the Axis in November 1940 and even took part in the German invasion of Russia. However, on April 17, 1943, when Hitler urged Hungary to allow the Jews to be “resettled,” Hungary refused. This was the status quo until March of 1944 when the German army invaded the country. The 750,000 Jews living within the extended borders were in immediate danger. Many were deported.

### **Italy**

As long as Mussolini ruled Italy, no Jews were deported to death camps. Only when Germany occupied Italy in 1943 were SS units able to move in, and the deportations to Auschwitz began.

### **Vatican**

On October 16, 1943, the Germans searched Rome for Jews to be deported. There were more than 7,000. Pope Pius XII personally ordered the Vatican clergy to open the Sanctuaries of the Vatican to all “non-Aryans” in need of refuge. 477 Jews were given refuge in the Vatican itself and another 4,238 Jews were given sanctuary in Church institutions throughout Rome. When the round-ups began, only 1,015 Jews were found and deported.

### **United States**

It is said that the United States did “too little, too late.” In spite of that, the U.S. did rescue some Jews.

A private group known as The Emergency Rescue Committee, formed in 1940 and sent Varian Fry to Europe and successfully rescued more than 1,000 refugees (only some were Jewish).

The War Refugee Board, a federal agency formed in 1944, played a crucial role in the rescue of as many as 200,000 Jews. Enlisting the help of Raoul Wallenberg, approximately 70,000 Jews of Budapest were saved, and Ruth Gruber assisted in the rescue of approximately 1,000 Jewish refugees from Europe.

**Slide 37: RESCUE (Breaker Slide: Righteous Among the Nations)**

**Slide 38: CHART OF RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS**

Yad Vashem in Jerusalem is Israel's national memorial to the approximately six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

In 1963, Yad Vashem embarked upon a worldwide project to grant the title of "Righteous Among the Nations" or "Righteous Gentiles" to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. To this end, Yad Vashem set up a public committee headed by a retired Supreme Court justice, which is responsible for granting the title. This project is the only one of its kind in the world that honors, using set criteria, the actions of those individuals who rescued Jews during the war.

In general, when the data on hand clearly demonstrates that a non-Jewish person risked his (or her) life, freedom, and safety in order to rescue one or several Jews from the threat of death or deportation to death camps without receiving any monetary compensation, this qualifies the rescuer for serious consideration to be awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" title. This applies equally to rescuers who have since passed away.

As of January 2006, 21,309 people have been recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations."

### **Slide 39: Rescue: American Righteous Gentiles**

Yad Vashem has named 3 Americans to its list of “Righteous Among the Nations”:  
Waitstill & Martha Sharp and Varian Fry.

#### **Waitstill and Martha Sharp**

Waitstill was a minister in the Unitarian church in Wellesley, MA. His wife, Martha, was a noted social worker. In 1939, the Sharps accepted an invitation by the Unitarian Service Committee to help members of the Unitarian church in Czechoslovakia. Shortly after their arrival, Prague came under Nazi control. Fearing possible arrest, they left Prague in June, 1940, landing in Portugal on a mission to help refugees from war-torn France. They made their way into Vichy-controlled France, seeking ways to help Jewish and non-Jewish refugees from Nazi terror. Lion Feuchtwanger, a world famous German-Jewish author of historical fiction, had settled in France, together with other German anti-Nazi intellectuals. He was wanted by the Nazis. Hearing of Feuchtwanger’s plight from Varian Fry, an emissary for the U.S. Emergency Rescue Committee, Waitstill and Martha Sharp took it upon themselves to organize Feuchtwanger’s escape. Using forged identity cards and bribes, Waitstill and Martha successfully smuggled Feuchtwanger and his wife into Spain then Portugal and on to the U.S.

Martha then returned to Vichy, France to plead the case for a group of 9 Jewish children. All 9 children made it to the U.S.

Martha Sharp died in 1999. Waitstill had passed away in 1984. Both were honored posthumously on June 13, 2006 at Yad Vashem.

#### **Varian Fry**

The cease fire agreement between Germany and France had stated that France was obligated to turn over any anti-Nazi refugees on the Gestapo’s list – a large number of whom were Jews. In response to this, an organization was established in the U.S. known as the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC), whose purpose was to aid intellectuals stranded in France and bring them to the U.S. In June 1940, the U.S. government agreed to provide entry visas to 200 intellectuals who were in danger of being arrested. Varian Fry was selected to be the ERC representative in France. His job was to reach Marseilles, which held the largest concentration of these refugees, and to find a way to get them out. He had a list of 200 names of those eligible for visas and a sum of \$3,000 on his person.

Arriving in Marseilles in August 1940, he summoned the refugees on his list. Rumor of his arrival had already spread and hundreds of people came to ask for assistance. Fry decided to find ways – most of which were illegal – to smuggle out these refugees who faced immediate danger of falling into German hands. He rented an office and put together a staff to deal in legal as well as illegal emigration – forging documents and smuggling refugees across border by land and sea.

As evidence mounted that Fry was operating illegally, the Vichy administration sought his removal from the country. In this effort they were assisted by the U.S. State Department, which was seeking to prevent American entry into the war for as long as possible. Not long after the Vichy government obtained American cooperation in 1941, Fry was arrested and deported back to the U.S. after 13 months of operation. The ERC’s activities were halted indefinitely.



Fry estimates that his office dealt with some 15,000 cases by May 1941. Of these, assistance was provided to approximately 4,000 people, over 1,000 of whom were smuggled from France in various ways. Among the Jews Fry helped to smuggle were a number of well-known figures such as Hanna Arendt (writer), Marc Chagall (artist), Jacques Lipchitz (sculptor), Siegfried Kracauer (film critic), Franz Werfel (author), Peter Pringsheim (physicist) and many others. When asked as to his motives, Fry responded that when he had visited Berlin in 1935, he saw SA men assaulting a Jew, and he felt he could no longer remain indifferent.

#### **Slide 40: AVENUE OF THE RIGHTEOUS, YAD VASHEM**

The name “Yad Vashem” means “a hand (or monument) and a name.” It is derived from the quote from Isaiah 56:5:

*I will give them in My house and in My walls, a monument and name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall never be effaced.*

At Yad Vashem there is a special avenue lined with carob trees (known for their sturdiness and strength) leading to the Holocaust Museum. Plaques adjacent to each tree record the names of those being honored along with their country of residence during the war. More plaques appear on walls of honor in the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations.

This avenue is called the “Avenue of the Righteous” and each of the more than 21,000 trees planted along the avenue and the hillside behind it was planted to honor the non-Jews who risked their lives to save the Jewish people. This was a way for the Jewish people to pay a tribute to people who went out of their way to help others.

#### **Slide 41**

*Remember that it is easy to save human lives.*

*One did not need to be crazy to feel pity for an abandoned child. It was enough to open a door, to throw a piece of bread, a shirt, a coin; it was enough to feel compassion ...*

*In those times, one climbed to the summit of humanity by simply remaining human.*  
-Elie Wiesel, 1984

What difference did the rescuers make? The Nazis’ “Final Solution” was meant to be a single, universal policy. Yet across Europe, the varying success in implementing the “Final Solution” depended both on the Nazi attitude toward a particular occupied country and the attitude of the native population toward their Jews. In Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, 9 out of 10 Jews were killed. In Denmark, 9 out of 10 were saved. A crucial difference was the behavior of ordinary citizens toward their neighbors.

When citizens stood by and did nothing, Jews were murdered. When citizens took it upon themselves to act as rescuers, Jews had a chance.

## **Slide 42: TEACHING ABOUT RESCUE**

## **Slide 43: WHEN DO I TEACH RESCUE?**

- Place rescue within the larger narrative of the Holocaust.
- Rescue can be taught in chronological context or as an addendum to the larger story of the Holocaust.

Rescue should be taught as a subtopic within the history of the Holocaust. It is important not only to place rescue in the larger narrative, but also to avoid making it the redemptive postscript. This is a question of emphasis, but also of placement. Rescue spans the entire chronology of the Holocaust, so it could be introduced at various points along the way. However, if rescue is taught at the end of a Holocaust unit, students might see the phenomenon as a silver lining. It is appropriate for students to derive meaning from rescue, but only if they engage, first and foremost, with the cataclysmic reality of the Holocaust.

## **Slide 44: SUGGESTED APPROACHES**

- Comparing Acts of Rescue
- Exploring Rescuers' Motivations
- Considering the Importance of Cooperation
- Debating the Morality of Disobedience
- Contrasting Rescuers from Different Backgrounds
- Making Sense of Rescuers' Flaws
- Understanding Why the Rescuers' Were So Few
- Defining Our Own Obligations

## **Slide 45: COMPARING ACTS OF RESCUE**

Students should use the page-long stories of rescue found at [www.JFR.org](http://www.JFR.org) to complete the chart and any relevant materials from the study of the Holocaust and WWII.

In a class discussion, have the students look at each category individually, thinking about the significance of these facts in the context of the larger stories. Then have the students talk more generally about the similarities and differences in the acts of rescue described in the chart.

### **Slide 46: EXPLORING RESCUERS' MOTIVATIONS**

Examining statements that rescuers made about their own actions can help us to understand why they chose to do what they did. Write some of the following quotes on the board, which come from rescuers featured in the posters. First have the students read the stories of the rescuers who are quoted. Then divide the class into small groups and have each group discuss each statement. The students should identify attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that seem to have influenced the rescuers' actions. They might also discuss the ways in which religious convictions served as a motivating factor for some rescuers.

### **Slide 47: CONSIDERING THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION**

Cooperation was a crucial aspect of rescue.

Choose from the following rescuers.

Divide the class into groups (the number of students in each group must equal the number of rescuers chosen).

Assign one member in each group to read the story of one of the rescuers. Give each student only the story of the rescuer he or she is assigned.

Allow time for students to read their respective handouts and to become familiar with the stories. Divide the students into expert groups, putting together those who were assigned the same rescue story.

In each of these groups, the students should discuss the role that cooperation played in the story they read. They should come up with key points that they want to share with their classmates. Next, have the students reconvene in their home groups, and have each student tell the story of the rescuer he or she focused on and explain how cooperation was crucial to the success of that individual's rescue work.

### **Slide 48: DEBATING THE MORALITY OF DISOBEDIENCE**

Aiding a Jew in any country occupied by the Germans was illegal. All those who undertook rescue work broke the law. In addition to violating the rules set forth by the Germans, some rescuers disobeyed instructions from their own superiors.

Distribute the stories of these rescuers and give students time to read them.

Then have a class discussion that takes up the following questions:

How can we reconcile rescuers' disobedience to authority with their life-saving actions?

How might these individuals have interpreted social responsibility and integrity, traits that we typically associate with respect for authority?

Under what circumstances is it acceptable to break the rules and to defy the power that be?

To what lengths should we go for what we believe is right?

### **Slide 49: CONTRASTING RESCUERS FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS**

One distinction we can make is between rescuers who were in positions of power and those who were seemingly powerless.

Choose two rescuers from the first group and two from the second.

Read the handouts with their stories.

Have students write brief responses to the following questions:

1. How did these individuals differ in the types of rescue they performed?
2. What resources were those in the first group able to draw on that enabled them to rescue many people? What unique difficulties did they face?
3. How were those in the second group able to overcome the limitations or obstacles they faced to be successful in their rescue work? What resources did they draw on?
4. What similarities can we identify among the rescuers in the two groups, both in terms of their actions and the traits they displayed?

### **Slide 50: MAKING SENSE OF RESCUERS' FLAWS**

Give students time to read the stories of these rescuers, then show them these statements.

In a class discussion, pose the following questions:

1. How can we reconcile these true statements with the fact that each of these men risked their lives to save the lives of so many people?
2. How might these statements shape our understanding of the rescuers in general?
3. How might they shape our understanding of our own potential?

### **Slide 51: UNDERSTANDING WHY THE RESCUERS WERE SO FEW**

It is important to understand that rescue was rare. It is also important to address the question of why most people living under German occupation chose not to help their Jewish neighbors.

In a class discussion, have students put forth ideas as to why there were so few rescuers. This should not be limited to the point that many people supported – or were at least indifferent to – the persecution and murder of the Jews. Some would-be helpers may have been deterred by the circumstances of life under German occupation, such as those listed on the slide.

After discussing reasons why most people did not become rescuers, turn the question of how come individuals were able to overcome the challenges outlined above.

## **Slide 52: DEFINING OUR OWN OBLIGATIONS**

Many rescuers felt a responsibility to help the Jews they saved. Some said that they could not have acted otherwise. It was a matter of obligation.

1. Have students think about the obligations they feel toward the people in their lives and toward the groups to which they belong.
2. Then have each student create a chart like the one on the slide.
3. After completing the charts, each student should choose one of the issues he or she identified, develop an action plan, and implement it over the course of the grading period, semester, or year.

You might have the students keep a journal to record their progress.