HOLOCAUST RESCUERS

By Pamela Blevins

"…it is important that we not only remember the atrocities and violence and murder and terror of that time, but that we also consider the sparks of humanity that glowed in the midst of that darkest of midnights… It is always instructive and uplifting to examine the lives of such decent men and women"

Congressman Tom and Mrs. Annette Lantos

Washington, DC July 1996

Raoul Wallenberg was responsible for saving both. (Skoglund, p. VII)

This quotation leads to the consideration of rescuers, who and what they were. The study of rescuers gives insight into individuals and what makes them tick. Some consider studying rescuers as part of the Holocaust as wrong. They are of the belief that the rescuers will overshadow the evils that occurred and leave one with a feeling that all was well. However, I think that we must look at all aspects of the time period to attempt to fully understand what happened. While Yad Vashem, as of January 1, 2001, has recognized 18,269 people as Righteous Gentiles (Righteous Gentiles, p.1), the rescuers are thought to number between 50,000 to 500,000. The true number will never be known due to the deaths of the rescuers, those they tried to help, and the real need of the rescuers to have anonymity. (Oliner, p.1) Rabbi Harold M. Schulweiss said, "We simply do not know how many were involved in the conspiracies of goodness. No systematic search for rescuers has been instigated by any national or international body. Regrettably, there are no Wiesenthals to search out the rescuers and their accomplices in protecting, hiding, feeding and saving the hunted." (Holocaust Heroes: Reluctant p. 1) Even these numbers represent less than ½ of 1% of the total population under Nazi occupation." (Oliner, p.2) Although we don't know all of them and it was indeed a small number, to those who were saved, it is a huge number. This is not meant to be nor can it be a conclusive or all-encompassing review of rescuers. It would be impossible to tell all their stories in one hour. The rescuers I talk about represent only a minute portion of the stories. More and more stories are being told daily as survivors struggle to remember and keep alive the memories of those who perished. Many rescuers have refused to talk before for fear of reprisals, many are still afraid. Those in Poland, for example, have been persecuted and many imprisoned by the Soviet and Communist regime that took over after the war. Some, rescuers and rescued alike, are still afraid to come forward and probably never will.

In selecting those I speak of today, I chose those who have books, appropriate to middle school students, written about them or by them. I do this to encourage future reading of their stories and others like them. I also include harder books for reference in the bibliography. In speaking of rescuers, it must be noted that they represent only a small number of people. This in

any way must not overshadow nor minimize the importance and significance of the horrors of the Holocaust. Rather, it should enhance understanding of this period of history. One Polish survivor, Mrs. Pesa Cimerman said, "We must talk about these people. We must bring it to light. Just as evil can spread if it is given too much light, so I think goodness can spread. But not enough is said about it." (Tomaszewski, p 115.)

World War II brought out the worst characteristics possible in mankind as well as the best. What made "good" people turn on their friends and neighbors to the extent they did is unknown. Why so many people turned their backs on the downtrodden is difficult to understand. On the other hand, it also brought out the best in mankind. Many people failed to give up their belief in helping others. These people continued to live their lives in the very best way possible despite tremendous difficulties. What made them strong enough to stand up for what they believed and risk everything to help others? Although it seems easier to understand why someone stood up, it is really quite difficult to understand. The characteristics of those who helped are as varied as are the people themselves. This project will involve a closer look at the people who risked everything to rescue people from the Nazis during World War II. It will look at who they were, why they rescued people, what risks they took to help people, and then some of the rescuers- diplomats, religious groups and individuals, and others who helped.

Who are those who helped hide Jews and others in jeopardy during World War II? Some people were involved in passive assistance. These are those who kept silent. Many times silence is regarded as accepting what the Nazis were doing, but not in this case. They knew their neighbors were harboring Jews and chose not to say anything to the authorities in spite of the rewards being given. By their silence, they were helping. They also might have given money or food; but upon the understanding that no one know where it came from and they did not know where it went. Still others were involved in active assistance. They took an active role in securing the safety and welfare of Jews. They were involved in sheltering, providing food, providing papers, and helping them to flee. Survival for a Jew in areas under direct Nazi control was impossible without the aid of non-Jews. The people who became rescuers were challenged by

the call for help. They came from all walks of life and all social classes. They were the exception to the rule. They were farmers, secretaries, housewives, factory owners, diplomats, priests, clergy, entrepreneurs, business owners, students, and other "everyday" individuals. There is nothing about them that made them stand out. Nothing set them apart from others around them except their love for others and possibly their hatred for Nazis. The difference between these people and others is that they followed their consciences. They helped because it was the thing to do. They did not want recognition, and still don't. They do not see themselves as special or heroic. Although they phrase it differently, basically they did what they did simply because it was the thing to do, they could do nothing else.

Various religions spoke out for Jews, but they were neither numerous enough nor loud enough. It is evident that together they could have done more. When they spoke out as a loud voice against the killing of the handicapped, the executions stopped. Had they spoken out loud enough, perhaps the executions of Jews would have stopped. Since they didn't, we will never know. The Quakers were the first church to speak out as church policy. However, it must be noted that they did this not because the victims were Jews, but because it was against their religion to allow persecution of any human. They not only sheltered and fed thousands but also were heavily involved in the *Kindertransport*. The Protestant religions spoke out as well and were persecuted along with the Jews. Catholics spoke out as well. There is a controversy about whether or not the Pope specifically spoke out against persecution of Jews. It is definite that he knew what was going on because letters of commendation to various bishops and priests survive in which he praises them for their actions. It must be noted that the Pope has to follow certain rules and regulations as to what he can and cannot say. It must also be noted that the rhetoric of the 1930's and 1940's is different from ours. Scholars say at that time everyone knew exactly what was meant when the Pope talked about persecution in general. This controversy still rages. Despite this, it is definite that individual members of the Catholic Church did help and paid dearly for their help. It is also pointed out in several references that the church as a whole did not attempt to convert Jewish children. Individuals did, of course, but it was not policy as seen when

the Church refused to recognize conversions after the war until it was evident that it was actually the choice of the convert. Instances of priests and nuns conducting Jewish religious classes and holding Jewish services for those in hiding are recorded. Regardless of religion, hundreds did speak out and hundreds of priests, pastors, rabbis, nuns, monks, etc. were incarcerated in concentration camps along with their Jewish brothers and sisters. It is interesting to note that in Poland, the records show that only ten nuns out of the hundreds who helped were executed for helping Jews. (Tomaszewski, p 65) In spite of knowing the consequences of their actions, they continued with the work of rescuing.

How did rescuers rescue others? The ways they helped are as varied as the rescuers themselves. Some hid Jews. They hid them behind false walls, in attics, in cellars, in barns, in haystacks, in cabinets, in basements, in holes, in caves, in unused stoves, in bookcases, in annexes, in unused zoo cages, in pigeon coops, in boxes, in garbage bins, in box beds, in graves and tombs, in cowsheds and stables, and a variety of other places. They used any place where the presence of a living being was considered unlikely. (Paliel, Chapter 2 and Meltzer, p. 17) They also hid those they could in the open, as relatives escaping the cities, as farm helpers, etc. These Jews, however, were the ones who did not look "Jewish". Those with "Aryan" looks found it much easier to hide than those with "Jewish" looks. It was easier to find hiding places in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe. Western Europe had the larger cities, homes, businesses, etc. Eastern Europe was generally poorer and more agriculturally orientated. The rescuer had to be prepared to not only shelter; but feed, clothe, and care for the Jews for an unspecified time. They had not only to provide the material things to survive; but also mental and emotional support as well. Others provided food both in actual food and ration cards. They sometimes claimed not to know what was going on; but then someone asked for more food than normal, they simply provided it. Your grocers, meat cutters, bakers, vegetable men, etc. were vital to the well being of those being hidden. Rescuers provided false papers for those in hiding. Some were given papers to allow them to live openly, others to travel. Again, sometimes they knew the people they helped, sometimes they did not. They guided people from one hiding place to

another or across borders to safe havens. These guides were invaluable. Others helped simply by their silence. Usually silence is taken negatively since it implied consent to what is going on. Here it was positive. Many times they knew a Jew was being hidden next door and simply chose to ignore the situation. By their silence, they were condoning the clandestine activities; but this time the activities were good not evil.

Why did rescuers choose to help others? It required the willingness, courage, and readiness to imperil the lives of one's families, the ability to devise and camouflage hideouts, the ability to devise emergency plans, and the ability to remain calm in the face of danger. (Paliel, chapter 2) There are as many reasons for becoming involved, as there were rescuers. The reasons varied according to the individual and the circumstances surrounding the event. Many rescuers will tell you they do not know why they did what they did, they just did it. Father Benoit said, "What I did for the Jewish people---is but an infinitesimal contribution of what should have been done---." (Paliel, p 89) Others calculated the risks involved and deliberately set out to help. Some say they helped because it was morally right. There was simply nothing else they could do. Edward Kemnitz, Polish rescuer and member of the rescue organization, Zegota, said, "You have to understand that the atrocities committed against the Jews were an offence against man and God. We could not accept Nazi rule." (Tomaszewski, p 117) Others helped because it would have been against their religion not to. The Quakers were the first to actively become involved. Protestants and Catholics were also active in helping those less fortunate. Some, however, gave into the pressures of the Nazis and helped only fleetingly and furtively. Others believed so fervently in their religions that they were very active in the underground activities against the Nazis. Many others helped those in need simply because they hated the Nazis. They knew that this was one way of resisting what the Nazis were doing. These people really had no strong feelings for those they helped. Some helped simply for the money involved. They hid people for a price. When money ran out, those in hiding generally were turned out to fend for themselves. Still others helped to gain free workers. Farmers were know to take young men and women who were strong and healthy to help on their farms in exchange for hiding them. Many who were

involved in the *Kindertransport* took children in to become unpaid servants or simply for the money they received in exchange for caring for these children. Some "fell" into helping. Oskar Schindler was one of these. He began helping simply because to help made it easier for him to make money in his factory. As he came into contact with his "workers" and saw where they lived and how they were treated, he gradually came to see them as individuals and helped because he wanted to. Whatever the reason they helped, the bottom line is that they did help. They made a definite difference for thousands of people who otherwise would have perished. Without their help, the thousands who did survive would not have had a chance.

They helped despite the risks they took. Knowing what would happen to them if they were caught did keep some from helping. Others took those risks into stride and continued. Major Helmrich arranged for a dozen women to go to Germany where his wife arranged domestic assignments for them. He said, "We preferred for our children to have dead parents than cowards as parents. After this decision, everything was relatively easy. We figured that after we had saved two Jews we were both equally guilty before Hitler if we were apprehended. Therefore, each additional person we saved was considered a bonus to us." (Paliel, Chapter 4) Those who helped shelter Jews and others knew that if they were caught, they could be sent to the camps along with those they sheltered. Not only those directly involved, but their families as well. Since they had to have help from others to feed and cloth those they hid, the Nazis wanted to find out who else was helping, so torture could be in their future if caught. They could also simply be shot or hanged if caught helping. Again, not only the individual, but also his entire family could suffer the same fate. Those who helped knew their own children were being put in danger, yet they continued to help those in need. For them, the saving of others far outweighed the risks. Sometimes families knew about the Jews and participated in helping, others were kept in the dark. The Nazis made it very plain that it was against their laws to help Jews. Repeatedly they issued notices by way of newspapers, radio, flyers, posters, that to help a Jew meant certain death. Everyone who helped knew the consequences of their actions if caught.

Diplomats

The people who could help the most were those in government and military positions. The most obvious of these were diplomats and their staffs. They were highly visible in their embassy and had access to many things that others did not; they also had more freedom of movement than others did. Not all, but many diplomats were involved from 1938. Those of the diplomats who helped acted in direct violation of the directives of their own countries and ultimately lost their diplomatic status as well as pensions. Most countries told their diplomats to help only those who held passports to their country or who had relatives in their country. They were not to concern themselves with others. Some diplomats followed these directives implicitly; others simply chose to ignore them as long as possible. They made agonizing decisions daily that resulted in life or death for thousands. They continued their activities openly and at great risk to themselves. Some diplomats involved those staff members who volunteered to help. Others refused to involve their staff members as much as possible. Some were able to help more than others depending upon the country in which they resided. Exactly why they behaved as they did is unknown. Their reasons were entirely their own.

Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Switzerland, and other countries all had their diplomatic heros. Some were influential in the years just prior to the war and others during the war. The diplomats came from varied countries, Romania, Bulgaria, China, Japan, Great Britain, the United States, Switzerland, Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Italy, Holland, El Salvador, and even Germany. Many were told not to help and even reprimanded for their activities. The Swiss diplomats were acting in direct defiance of their government's stand on neutrality. The Swiss did not want Jewish refugees in their country. They went so far as to ask the Germans to require the letter "J" on Jewish passports so they could readily identify Jewish refugees. Hans Keller, among others, chose to disregard his orders and allowed Jews into Switzerland. George Duckwitz, the Trade Attaché' to the German Embassy in Copenhagen, chose to go against his own country. Upon hearing the

Nazis, his own party, were going to deport the Jews of Denmark, informed the Danish government. This allowed the Danes to save about 7,000 Danish Jews by spiriting them to Sweden. Dr. Aristides de Sousa Mendes of Portugal issued more than 30,000 visas and saved the Hapsburg royal family as well as the Belgian cabinet. Carl Lutz of the Swiss embassy in Hungary is credited with being the first neutral diplomat to save Jews. He invented the "protective letter" and issued 8,000 letters with the permission of the Nazis and Hungarian government. He interpreted the language to mean "families" instead of individuals thus the 8,000 letters covered approximately 62,000 people. (Paliel, Chapter 3). He is given the distinction of being the "largest single issuer of visas, saving approximately 60,000 Jews." (Korn, p.2) Peter Zurcher, a lawyer sent by Lutz as a temporary representative in Pest, just days before the Russians liberated Pest, threatened the SS commander in charge of eliminating the 70,000 inhabitants of the ghetto with charges of war crimes and not only convinced him not to order his troops to enter the ghetto but to actually protect it from the fascist Arrow Cross. (Jewish Action) Thus, the diplomats did indeed step out to the forefront to help. "Collectively diplomats issued more than 200,000 visas despite clear governmental prohibitions." (Korn, p. 2) These are the "unsung heroes by their own government that in a way defied the silence of their governments." (Korn, p.2)

Among the diplomats, five stand out. These are Giorgio "Jorge" Perlasca, Raoul Wallenberg, Per Anger, Jan Karski, and Chiune Sugihara.

Giorgio "Jorge" Perlasca was not an official diplomat. He was an Italian who had been granted Spanish citizenship after fighting for Spain in the Spanish American War. He had volunteered to go to Budapest to help in rescuing Jews. After the departure of the Spanish Ambassador, Perlasca appointed himself "Spanish Ambassador" and continued to issue protective passes. He also protected the Spanish safe houses from the Nazis and the Arrow Cross. He is credited with saving approximately 3,000 lives. (Jewish Action p. 43

Raoul Wallenberg was born after the death of his father, thus never knowing him and ultimately being raised by his grandfather. He was born with a caul on his head, which at that time indicated greatness. Raoul was to fulfill that superstition. Raoul was a curious young boy

who loved people. Several times during his childhood, this curiosity almost got him into trouble. When time came for him to go to college, he traveled to the United States to Ann Arbor, Michigan. Here he gained a degree in architecture. During this time, however, he gained a more extensive education through his summer travels across the United States by hitchhiking. One time, he was offered a ride with four rough-looking men. He knew it was probably not a good idea, but he accepted. Sure enough, they pulled into the woods intending to rob him. During the robbery, Raoul remained calm, giving them what they wanted and even having the audacity to ask for a ride back to the road. Surprisingly, they gave him the ride and threw him out with his suitcases. Alive and unhurt, he marveled at his ability to stay calm in a dangerous situation. This ability to stay calm was to save him later in his life. Upon his return home, he intended to enter the banking field with his grandfather. It soon became obvious that he was not cut out to be a banker. Eventually, he became a partner in a firm that exported specialty foods. The owner, being Jewish, could no longer travel freely throughout Europe. This was left to Raoul. As he traveled, he saw what was being done to Jews in Germany and the countries Hitler took over. This disturbed him greatly and he wondered what could be done. One evening, he attended a movie at the British embassy with his sister. The movie was about a man who secretly saved people from death at the hands of the government. When his sister asked him how he felt about the movie, he told her he wanted to do the same thing the hero of the movie did. This was to prove prophetic.

Although Sweden was a neutral country, the king was working with Jewish leaders and the War Refugee Board from the United States. Raoul was asked by the War Refugee Board to help. Raoul accepted under the conditions that he was given complete freedom to do whatever he needed to do, did not have to file reports of his activities, and was given lots of money. His conditions were accepted and, Raoul was given the passport and title of a Swedish diplomat, although he was working for and paid entirely by Americans. Knowing this would mean his immediate death if discovered by the Germans, Raoul went ahead with his mission.

Immediately upon his arrival in Budapest, Hungary, Raoul began to take charge and shake things up. He created the Schultz-Pass, which was just a piece of paper with fancy writing on it although it stated the person was protected by Sweden. The Germans accepted it; but outside Hungary it would have been useless. He created Section C at the embassy that was to issue passes. He bullied Admiral Horthy and the Jewish Council into helping him. Other than issuing passes, his first major action was to stop a train headed for Auschwitz. When he heard about it, he immediately began a phone campaign to Admiral Horthy protesting this action. Everyone he knew and everyone they knew contacted Horthy and pestered him until he ordered the train halted and returned. This was done while Adolph Eichmann, Nazi leader in charge of deportations, was in Budapest. Eichmann was very angry. He called the Jewish Council to meet with him. The Council waited all day for him, only to have Eichmann tell them that the Jews who had been on the train that was turned back had been placed on another train and taken directly to Auschwitz. This defeat made Raoul more determined to stop Eichmann and the Nazis.

Colonel Lazlo Ferenczy was in charge of shipping Jews off to the camps. In this process, he also confiscated their property. Raoul and the Red Cross went to see him and purchased three houses each to be used to shelter "Swedes" until they could travel to Sweden. Knowing full well these "Swedes" were in reality Jews, Ferenczy agreed. Now he had "safe houses" for Jews. He convinced wealthy Jews who still owned property to sign their homes over to the Swedish embassy for safekeeping until the end of the war. Hanging the Swedish flag over the doorways, Raoul was well on his way to help people. As Raoul and the Swedish embassy began their quest, other embassies followed suit. Still, this was not enough. Raoul set up hospitals throughout Hungary, staffed with his new "Swedes" to help those too poor or sick to get to the embassies. As well as providing services, these hospitals and safe houses provided hope to the Hungarian Jews. He set up soup kitchens to feed the poor, created sewing circles to make clothing that was then given away, organized Jews to help repairing buildings, etc. The Jews began to feel that someone out there cared.

Eichmann was determined to liquidate the Hungarian Jews. As he worked towards this goal, he was thwarted again and again by Raoul and the Swedish legation as well as other neutral legations. When Himmler recalled Eichmann, Eichmann felt he was thwarted and vowed he would return. Raoul and the others were relieved when Eichmann left. Things just might work out. With the Nazis gone, Raoul worked to get workers from the "work camp" released. They would still work, but would go home at night. Persecution of Jews eased a little. However, now their persecution came from the Arrow Cross. This was an organization of Hungarian boys who went to Nazi-style meetings and rallies. They were brutal and more dangerous than the Nazis because at times there was no true leader to reign in their actions. They began breaking into Jewish homes and terrorizing people. No one was exempt, not even the neutral embassies. In spite of the Arrow Cross, things were beginning to look up for Hungary. Then, Eichmann and the Germans returned. Eichmann forced Horthy to resign and give Germans control. He was able to do this because he kidnapped Horthy's only remaining son. Horthy lived for his son and did not have the courage to hold out.

Germans began rounding up Jews regardless of their papers. Those who resisted were immediately killed. The "Final Solution" of the Hungarian Jews had begun under Eichmann. Wallenberg and others did what they could to help. Wallenberg went to the holding areas and train stations to make sure those who had "Swedish" papers were not taken. He had a book where the names were written. Anyone who actually had papers was released. Those who didn't gave Wallenberg his name, which was promptly written in the book, and then they were released. Actual papers would come later. Wallenberg handed out passes at this time and actually pulled people from the trains. In addition, he had his photographer take clandestine photos at each stop of what the Nazis were doing. Wallenberg worked long and hard day in and day out. Many times his sleep was interrupted by an emergency. Just about the only ones he could not help were those who were captured by the Arrow Cross. Without a leader, there was no one to control the masses.

The more Wallenberg interfered, the more determined Eichmann became. At a dinner, Wallenberg got Eichmann to confess that he did not believe all the things he should about the Nazi party; but the war gave him power and wealth. Eichmann told Wallenberg that his goal would be achieved if he had to murder Wallenberg. Two days later, Wallenberg's car was involved in a traffic accident. Knowing this was no accident, but attempted murder, Wallenberg went to headquarters to protest. It only resulted in Eichmann refusing to take the blame. The feud now became a personal one.

Before Eichmann was able to finish off the Jews or to kill Wallenberg, the Russians liberated Budapest. Eichmann fled. Wallenberg had formulated plans to rebuild and take care of people after liberation. He asked to see Marshal Rodion Malinovsky who was in charge. His interview was granted; but it was to be held in Debrecen. Thinking it to be a trap, his friends and coworkers begged him not to go. As he left town, he stopped by several organizations to say goodbye and to discuss what was to be done in his absence. Wallenberg and his driver, escorted by Russian guards, were never seen or heard of again. They were taken to Moscow's Lubianka Prison where they were separated. At the time of his capture, Wallenberg was credited with saving 100,000 lives. (Skoglund p 76) Per Anger said he was a hero because he "could think on his feet, act with wisdom in a split second, and make things work in ways no one thought of." (Skoglund p 81) No one was able to stop him in his work. He was threatened but nothing came of those threats. Only in the end did the Russians succeed in stopping him. Thus, friends, not the enemy, stopped Wallenberg. (Skoglund p 83) In 1957, when the family pressed the government for information, they were told Wallenberg died in July 1947 of a heart attack. There are neither records nor a death certificate to validate their claims. Several prisoners and others said they saw Wallenberg as late as 1974. The Soviet government has denied all such sightings. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin promised to find and release information relating to Wallenberg. Family members were told Wallenberg was executed in 1947 as a spy. However, in 2000, a commission formed to look into the disappearance of Wallenberg said the claim that he died is not valid and that he could

still be alive somewhere in the Soviet system. Whatever his fate, the number of Jews saved from certain death is in the thousands. The number of people to whom he gave hope to is unknown.

"Although Per Anger remained in the background and in that sense was Wallenberg's silent partner, he played a crucial role. Wallenberg's ability to act depended upon the work of the neutral Swedish legation." (Skoglund p 94) Per Anger actually began the efforts of the Swedish Legation to save Jews long before Wallenberg appeared on the scene. At the start of Anger's diplomatic career, he was sent to Berlin where he worked in the trade department. At this time, he was very young and definitely inexperienced. In Berlin, he witnessed the hold Hitler had over the people and some of the horrors associated with deportation. Upon leaving Berlin, He returned to Stockholm for a short time before he was sent to Budapest where he worked mostly in the trade division. After Germany invaded Hungary, Pers began seeing exactly what was going on with the Germans. He came up with the idea to issue provisional passports. The Minister approved the idea; but told Pers he would have to shoulder the blame if there was any problem. Eventually, the ministry approved the passports. From here, he came up with the idea to issue protective passes. These passes as well as the provisional passports had no legality outside Hungary. Thus, he was issuing protective passes long before Wallenberg arrived. . After Wallenberg arrived, Pers was able to branch out into all the other activities that arose. Wallenberg was so personable and persuasive that he overshadowed Pers Anger to some extent. Pers did travel to Stockholm in 1944 to obtain reinforcements for the legation. Others soon arrived to help Pers and Wallenberg in their clandestine activities. Pers assisted Wallenberg in going to the train stations during deportation proceedings and pull people off the trains. One day when he was on his own, he managed to save 150 Jews from deportation. Only two had protective passes. Thus, Pers was able to hold his own in these rescue activities. When the Russians arrived, Pers argued with Wallenberg about going to meet the Russians. Pers felt Wallenberg's life would be in danger. It seems he was right, for Wallenberg disappeared. After the war, Pers Anger became one of the leaders in attempting to find out what happened to Wallenberg. He continues his efforts today.

Chiune Sugihara of Japan was in a unique situation. His country was allied to Germany. The unique life of Chiune Sugihara began at his birth on January 1, 1900 and ended with his death on July 30, 1986. From the first, Chiune's family believed he was destined to do something special with his life. Never did they dream he would end up saving thousands of lives. Chiune was taught, as all other Japanese children, "to not be a burden to others, to take care of others, and not to expect rewards for his goodness." He often wondered how he would live up to these words. His father wanted him to become a doctor. When Chiune told his father he wanted to be a teacher instead, his father was furious and refused to pay for his education. Unable to find funding for his teacher's education, Chiune took a subsidy to study for a diplomatic career and travel abroad. Thus, Chiune became a diplomat by default.

His career took off quietly as he studied Russian, English, Chinese, French, and German. During a stay in Tokyo, he met Yukiko who was to become his wife. She was not the traditional Japanese wife, although she could act the part if needed. She became his confidant and main supporter. They had two children by the time World War II started. Chiune could never have accomplished all he did without the backing of Yukiko.

While stationed in Kuanas (Kovno), Lithuania, Chiune became aware of what the Germans were doing to Jews and other unfortunate people. Since his country was an ally of Germany, Chiune could do little to help. During a Chanukah celebration, another guest, Mr. Rosenblat, told of his escape from Poland and what the Germans were doing to Jews. He asked Chiune to get him a visa out of the country. Chiune was doubtful his country would allow him to help; but he agreed to see Mr. Rosenblat the next day. Unfortunately, Mr. Rosenblat did not show up for the meeting nor was he seen later. Gradually, Chiune came to see that Jews should leave and gently warned his Jewish friends to leave if they could. Many did not or could not.

When their third son was born in Kovno, Chiune wanted to send his family back to Japan. His wife refused. She and the children would remain with Chiune until his return to Japan. She was his wife for better or worse and would remain at his side.

On July 27, 1940, Chiune awoke to find his consulate besieged by Jews wanting visas to leave Lithuania by way of Japan. More than one hundred people surrounded the consulate wanting help, many were filthy and agitated, but quite respectful of the consulate. Chiune anguished about this, knowing these people needed help and aware that his country would probably refuse him permission to help. After meeting with a committee, he agreed to ask the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan, the Japanese Ambassador in nearby Latvia, and the Japanese ambassador in Germany for permission to issue great numbers of visas. At this time, also the Soviet government told him that his consulate was to be closed in August. He brazenly asked for an extension and was granted two months. Before cabling the ministry, he asked Yukiko for her thoughts. She told him that if he could help, he should.

The answer from Japan was not what Chiune wished it might be. He could issue visas to anyone who had an exit visa from Japan to another country. This helped some; but did not help others. The answers from the other two were decisively negative. Chiune remembered his lessons from childhood and with Yukiko's blessing decided to issue visas in defiance of his Foreign Ministry and under his own authority. These visas enabled their holders to escape to Kobe, Japan where they managed to immigrate to other countries. He wrote the majority of the visas himself so as not to involve his staff.

Until his consulate was finally closed, Chiune issued visas in defiance of his own Foreign Ministry. He did not know if they would indeed be honored when they were used, or not. He only knew he had to try. He worked day and night handwriting these visas. He issued over 2,193 official visas. Since these visas were for individuals, groups and families, there is no way of knowing how many people these visas represent. Also unknown is the exact number of unofficial visas he wrote since no record was kept once the consulate closed. He wrote visas until he could write no longer and he and his family had to get to the train. As a last act, he dropped a handful of diplomatic paper off the train as they left, hoping it would be used for forged documents.

Chiune was lucky, in a way, since he did not pay with his life. However, he and his family were placed in a camp where his youngest son died. After being released, he was returned to

Japan, never to go into diplomatic service again. Although very upset over the death of their son, Chiune and his wife still believed he had done the only thing he could have done. He and Yukiko had no idea how many if any people were saved by the visas. They only knew they could have done nothing else.

Eventually, Yad Vashem in Israel honored Chiune with the Righteous Among the Nations medal. At this time, he learned that his visas had indeed save many people. It is estimated that he issued over 6,000 visas. Although the exact number of survivors is not know the known survivors have an estimated 40,000 descendents today. This makes the rescue by Chiune the largest rescue of Jews in the Holocaust.

Individual Rescuers

Individuals were the most numerous in rescuing Jews and hiding them. Many of their stories are lost forever in the mists of time. Many do not feel they did anything special to be rewarded or even commended for. Some did not want their stories told for fear of retaliation from their towns after the war. Jan Karski, Father Benoit, Andre' and Magda Trocme, Varian Fry, Miep Geis, Oskar and Emilie Schindler, Irene Opdyke, and Corrie ten Boom are simply representatives of the thousands who helped. Unfortunately, not enough individuals helped and definitely not enough spoke out against the atrocities being committed.

Jan Karski was a Polish Catholic. He was a member of the Polish underground resistance. In his role as a resister, he helped hide Jews, provide them with food and clothing, and helped move many to safer locations. As a member of the resistance, he repeatedly crossed enemy lines to bring out information from German held Poland. When it became too dangerous for him to remain in Poland, he was forced to leave. However, before he left, he sneaked into the Warsaw Ghetto to get a first-hand view of what exactly was going on in the Ghetto. He also entered a Nazi concentration camp where he witnessed the mass murder of Jews. Armed with this startling and unbelievable information, he left Poland and traveled to London. There he gave a report of his findings and made an impassioned plea to top Allied officials for help. Gaining no

help here, he went to the United States where he visited personally with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and told him of the Nazi plans to exterminate Jews. Partly because his report could not be confirmed with alternate sources, and partly because it was so unbelievable, nothing was done by either the Allies or Roosevelt. Karski did not give up trying to convince people what he knew was accurate; but it was a long time before supporting reports began to change minds. After the war, Karski immigrated to the United States where he became a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

Father Benoit is an individual who illustrates how some rescuers "fell into" helping. Being French, Father Benoit had been evicted from Italy. He was sent to France where he had nothing really to do. One day a man who wanted help approached him. Father Benoit helped him thus beginning his true vocation. Through his connections, he managed to help thousands of Jews when they most needed help. In addition to helping find food, shelter, and clothing for many Jews, he also fabricated false credentials and directed them to the Spanish border. (Paliel, p 88) He attempted to bring the Jews of Nice into Italian control. This plan was foiled by the German occupation of northern Italy. Benoit escaped to Rome and focused on the Jews of Rome. His base of operation was the Capuchin College inside the Vatican. (Wexler Learning Center)

Andre' and Magda Trocme symbolize the people of the town of Le Chambon, France. Andre' was educated in the United States and met Magda there. He was a pacifist and a conscientious objector. These beliefs were not necessarily extremely popular in the town of Le Chambon. However, Andre' Trocme was also well liked; therefore, some of his beliefs were accepted though not embraced. Andre' was very vocal in his beliefs concerning racial persecution. The village of Le Chambon was settled by French Huguenots searching for a place to avoid religious persecution. Therefore, when their descendants were faced with Jews fleeing to avoid religious persecution, they could do nothing but help. The village openly told the Nazis they would obey all their rules except those dealing with deportation and persecution. They told the truth to officials except when it meant betraying someone. However, without someone to lead them, they may not have been able to manage what they did. Here, Andre' Trocme emerged as

the leader. With Magda's help, Andre arranged for the safe hiding of nearly 5000 Jews in the small, rural town of Le Chambon. He set up an alarm system to notify all those in the village. The village conveniently set on a hill where anyone approaching could be seen for miles. When the police began approaching, Andre Trocme sent his Boy Scouts out to warn those in outlying areas of the danger. When questioned about the names and whereabouts of Jews in the village, Andre said he sis not know. He told the truth as most of the Jews who were hiding were using false names. As to where they were, by this time, the villagers had taken the Jews to places of safety. Even if Trocme had wanted to, he would not have been able to tell where they were. When the villagers began to waver in their belief, he quietly brought them back into the fold. It is to his credit that not only were no Jews, except those from the boy's school run by his nephew, Daniel, taken from Le Chambon. In addition, there were no informers from the village. Those who did not actively help kept silent. During the time Andre Trocme was caught and placed in prison, his wife carried on his work.

Varian Fry is the only American to be given the distinction of being a Righteous Gentile. Like Wallenberg, Varian did not set out to be a hero. When the Emergency Rescue Committee in New York began looking for someone to help they actually found him to be wanting. When they ran out of options and approached Varian, he also had his reservations about being the best for the job. In fact, he turned down the job; but did tell the Committee he was willing to help if they needed him. Unable to find anyone better, the Committee selected Varian. He was to travel to Marseilles, France to get out approximately 200 people. This list contained painters, sculptors, scientists, writers, intellectuals, news reporters, etc. Some on the list were Jewish, some were not; but all were wanted by the Nazis. Varian was to locate them and find a way to get them out safely. Varian found his job was more difficult than he thought. He had to work without the help of the US Consulate. The Consulate saw his activities as harmful to their relationship with the Germans. This was prior to the US involvement. He set out to set up his activities under the umbrella protection of the YMCA rescue mission. He arranged for housing, people to help him, bribes for the local police, etc. He soon found that not only were these 200 in trouble, but

thousands more. Through his activities, he got out about 1,000 people and helped thousands more with food, shelter, and money. When his passport expired, the US Consulate refused to renew it. This made him a stateless person and subject to the whim of the Vichy government. It was quite a dangerous situation for him. Finally the US agreed to renew his passport for one month. This would give him time to make arrangements to get out of France. The French did not give him that time; they picked him up and escorted him out of the country. His rescue mission did not stop upon his deportation, his workers continued getting people out over the mountain paths mapped by Fry to Spain and beyond. Upon returning to the United States, Varian Fry found himself unwanted and unneeded. His actions, being contrary to that of US policy at the time, made him a pariah. He continued helping the Emergency Rescue Committee as much as he could. He ended up teaching in a Connecticut school without a family. He died alone in his rented apartment. It wasn't until later that the United States publicly recognized his activities. Yad Vashem also honored him as a Righteous Gentile. .

Probably the best-known rescuer is Miep Geis. Although Austrian by birth, she was Dutch by choice having spent the majority of her life in Holland after WWI. She became a secretary in the OKPECT Company started by Otto Frank when he came to Holland. She gradually became more an office manager than a secretary and became Mr. Frank's right hand. When Mr. Frank decided the family must think about going into hiding, he carefully approached Mr. Kraeler, Mr. Kughler, and Miep Geis, about the advisability of hiding in the attic of the company and the extent to which they were willing to go to help. All accepted the challenge without hesitation. Although all three helped, the majority of the work in providing for those in hiding fell to Miep. She hunted all over Amsterdam and sometimes beyond for food, clothing and other supplies for the Frank and van Pelt families. Although the Frank family did not know it, she was able to do a great deal because of the resistance activities of her husband Jan. Not only did she help provide for the Frank family, she and Jan also hid a Jewish lady in their own home. Miep and the others provided information and hope to those in hiding as well as the essentials for living. After the Frank family and the others were discovered and taken away, Miep crept into the Secret Annex to see what

she could recover for them. Among the few things she retrieved was Anne's diary. Intending to return it to Anne unread upon her return, Miep put the diary pages into her desk drawer where they stayed until Mr. Frank's return. When confirmation came that Anne had died, Miep gave the papers to Mr. Frank and insisted he read them. Ultimately, these papers were published as The Diary of Anne Frank. Miep and Jan welcomed Mr. Frank into their home and lives after the war. Miep went on to write a book on her remembrances of that time of her life. When asked why she helped, she said it was just what had to be done. She never gave it a second thought. Others might regard her as a heroine; but she does not see herself in that light.

Lately, another rescuer has become a household name. This man is Oskar Schindler. Oskar was a businessman, drinker, womanizer, gambler, profiteer, briber, wheeler-dealer, and a Nazi party member. He joined the party because that was what was done at the time, not necessarily because of strong beliefs. Although he became disillusioned with the party about 1938, he never resigned. He became a spy for the Abwehr and later the contacts made proved invaluable. Probably the strongest belief Oskar had was to make enough money to live the life of leisure he wanted. He came to Krakow to make money. He purchased a small enamel factory and began making enamel pots and mess kits for soldiers to use during the war. He relied heavily on a Jewish accountant, Itzhak Stern for help in getting his factory started and running it for him. Emilie, who was also in Krakow, worked alongside Stern in running the factory. She was well aware of Oskar's womanizing going so far as to work with one of his mistresses at the factory. Oskar preferred to spend his time wining and dining women and living the good life. Stern "hired" Jewish prisoners to work the factory. As Oskar gradually became aware of the conditions under which the Jews lived and died, he authorized Stern to hire more Jewish workers. Witnessing the liquidation of the ghetto was most likely the turning point in Oskar's treatment of the Jews. This event triggered his need to help (Paliel, p) He bribed and cajoled Nazi leaders to give him larger contracts and other favors to expand his factory and his workers. When the Jews were transferred to Plazow Camp, he arranged for many of his workers to be granted the right to live in, providing spaces for them to live on the factory premises. As his factory grew, so did

suspicions of his motives. Bribes and payoffs grew. The Gestapo arrested Schindler twice. Paying bribes and having influential friends paid off in getting him released. Schindler also helped the Jews by going to Budapest and giving an eyewitness account of what was going on to Jewish leaders. He managed to take agents from the Jewish Rescue Operation into Plazow to take photos as proof of what was going on. (Meltzer, p 59-60) When Plazow began to close in the fall of 1944, Oskar decided to shut down his enamel factory and move to Brinnlitz, Czechoslovakia and begin an armament factory. By bribes and paying for his workers, Oskar convinced the Nazi leaders to allow him to take about 1,000 workers to his new factory. He convinced them that among his needed workers were several children. They were needed to polish the inside of the shells. There was a push to get on "Schindler's List". Some who had worked for him were left off and some who had never worked for him were put on the list. It is suggested that bribes were given to the person making up the list. Schindler himself had only a little to do with making the list. The 800 men were the first group to leave Plazow. They were taken to Auschwitz and on to Brinnlitz. During the long mixed-up ride, two young boys were lost. The two boys did manage to survive until liberation. Meanwhile, in Brinnlitz, the men anxiously awaited the arrival of their women. The women's train was also taken to Auschwitz. Here the 200 "Schindler" women were processed into a special section of the camp. It was finally with direct intervention from Schindler and probably a hefty bribe as well as many favors called in, that the women eventually made it to their new camp. The bribe was actually taken to Auschwitz by one of Schindler's mistresses who also served as his secretary. As a subsidiary camp, Schindler was required to have German guards at all times. Schindler decreed that they were to stay on the outskirts of the camp and not enter into the factory or camp itself. Had the guards known what was happening inside, they would have been forced to turn Schindler in. Inside the factory, Schindler gave instructions that no live shell would be made here. He had no intention of making a profit now. As a new factory, it was expected there would be startup problems so this would not be a problem at first. To further placate the Nazis, Schindler would occasionally buy shells and turn them in as his own. He insisted his workers be nursed to health and be given as much food as he could get for them.

In addition, he insisted they honor the Sabbath within this camp. Emilie was a force here at Brinnlitz in caring for the workers. Because he was a Nazi party member, Schindler was forced to run at the end of the war. He did this with the help of "his Jews". He and his wife left Brinnlitz with a guard of eight Jews and a letter of record of his deeds. When detained by the Americans, his story was told and he and Emilie were freed. (Meltzer, p 64) He and Emilie fled to Argentine where he attempted to farm. When this enterprise failed, he separated from Emilie and returned to Germany. He managed to get by with his pension and monetary help from those he helped save. Yad Vashem honored him as a Righteous Gentile in 1961. He died in Germany in 1974 and as requested was buried in the Latin cemetery in Jerusalem. Emilie remained in Argentina and died in 2001. Although Oskar began his activities to make money, he ended up spending his fortune to save Jews and ended up penniless himself. Schindler never could fully explain what made him change. The "Schindlerjuden", those he saved and their descendents, don't need an explanation. It is enough that he saved them.

Irene Gut Opdyke is a very unlikely rescuer. She was a Polish Catholic nursing student. When the Russians overcame her hospital, she was raped and taken with others to work in the Russian hospitals. Finally, she was exchanged back into German hands. She got a job working in a hotel that catered to Nazis gradually taking over management of the hotel. The hotel abutted the ghetto. This plus the Jewish workers who came to work in the hotel enabled her to see what was going on with the Jews. She overheard conversations in the hotel and passed on warnings to the Jewish workers and thus to the ghetto. She supplied food, clothing and supplies when she could. She created a hiding place in the laundry for the Jewish workers if they could not get back to the ghetto. This hiding place saved their lives on more than one occasion. Her beauty and management skills drew the attention of a German major. When he was transferred, he offered her a job as his housekeeper if she would come with him. Seeing that it would be safer in a private house rather than a hotel to help Jews, she agreed. In this new house, she managed to secret twelve Jews, including an infant, in the basement. She hid them there for months before their finally being discovered. When they were discovered, the major offered Irene a deal. He

wouldn't say anything if she agreed to become his mistress and agreed to get rid of the Jews. She agreed to be his mistress, although she never got "rid" of those in hiding. The Jews she was hiding never knew of her sacrifice in becoming his mistress. Due to her courage, resourcefulness, and sacrifice, all thirteen Jews survived.

Corrie ten Boom is another rescuer of merit. She came from very religious Dutch Reformed Church family. She and her sister lived with their father. Castor ten Boom was a well-known watchmaker. As the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, he was celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the family business. Therefore, he had many reasons not to help Jews but to stay on the Nazis good side. He was loved by friends and family alike and was well respected by his community. His business was thriving and looked to continue to thrive. Instead of playing it safe, he became a member of the Dutch resistance and took Jews into his own home. He had the unconditional support of his girls, Corrie and Betsie, his wife, his son Wiliem, and his nephews. The hiding place was built in Corrie's bedroom. His daughters, Corrie and Betsie, were just as involved as their father. Corrie had been a leader of several girls groups. This gave her many contacts throughout the Netherlands. She and her father used the watch shop as their contact point. When they were captured, they had six Jews hiding in their home. Though tortured, the ten Booms did not disclose the presence of the Jews. All six survived. Ten days after his arrest, Castor died of a heart attack, leaving his daughters to mourn in prison. Wiliem was released. Betsie was kept in another part of the prison. Corrie was sent to solitary confinement for nearly six months where she was questioned intensely. She drew on her faith to get her through this ordeal. When she was taken to the train station to transfer to another camp in Holland, she was reunited with her sister, Betsie. Here they were allowed letters and packages from home. In one package, Corrie received a bottle of vitamins and a Bible. She managed to keep these with her during her transfer to Ravensbruck. She and Betsie were transferred to Ravensbruck together. While in Ravensbruck, Corrie dealt out her vitamin drops carefully. However, no matter how many she gave out, there were always more in the bottle. She believes it was a miracle, although a small one. While in Ravensbruck, Corrie and Betsie held Bible

lessons and prayer sessions to give others hope. Conducting these meetings put them in danger of death; but they continued anyway. During their time here, Betsie taught Corrie not to hate but believe more in her faith of a loving God. In December 1944, Betsie told Corrie of a dream she had of Corrie running a large house that gave refuge to those in need. Shortly after this and a few days before Christmas, Betsie died. On December 30, 1944, Corrie was released. She was later to find out this had been a clerical mistake. Several days following her release, the women of her age group in the barracks were "eliminated". Due to luck or divine intervention, Corrie was not with them. Corrie went on to live a full life. She was given the gift of a large house that she turned into a refuge for the needy as was seen in Betsie's dream. She wrote The Hiding Place to tell of her life and how her faith helped her survive. It was later made into a movie. She traveled across Europe and the US talking about her experiences and how her faith kept her going. She died on her 91st birthday. .

These individuals represent only a glimpse into the rescuers. Thousands of individuals saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust in every country. Even though there were thousands of rescuers, there were too few. Too few who did what they could, as little as that was. Many will go unknown and unthanked. Some prefer anonymity and refuse to tell their stories. Others have been persuaded to come forth and tell their stories. Yad Vashem had undertaken the task of finding those Righteous Gentiles and honoring them. As one reads the survivor stories that are coming out and the books about the rescuers, we attempt still to answer the many questions we still have and to create more questions. What made them do what they did despite the risks to themselves and their families is something that still eludes us. As we look at the lives of these people and others, we get a glimpse into the minds and feelings of those who saved and those who were saved. Some did a little and some did a lot. However, according to the Talmud, " Whosoever saves one life saves the world."