

THERE  
MAY BE  
TIMES WHEN  
WE ARE  
POWERLESS  
TO PREVENT  
INJUSTICE  
BUT THERE  
MUST NEVER  
BE A TIME  
WHEN WE  
FAIL TO  
PROTEST

ELIE WIESEL



**NEVER  
AGAIN:  
WHAT  
YOU  
DO  
MATTERS**

**Holocaust Days of Remembrance**

### Biography

Mr. Daniel Kennedy, Jr. attended primary school on military bases, in the civilian public, and private schools. Graduating high school in 1975, from Boone High School, Orlando, Florida, Mr. Kennedy went on to study for the Roman Catholic priesthood at St. Meinrad College, Indiana, and received a BA in philosophy in 1979. He continued to study and received a Masters in Divinity (Mdiv) from St. Meinrad School of Theology in 1984 and has taken various history courses at the University of Central Florida (UCF), Orlando. He was a doctoral candidate at UCF from 2002–2004.

Preface

Mr. Daniel P. Kennedy is a consultant for the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) and created this publication for the Holocaust Days of Remembrance. This publication is posted on the Internet at: <http://www.deomi.org>. Additionally, there are various materials on the DEOMI website that support other national observances.

The content and opinions expressed in this document are the responsibility of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the military Services, or the Department of Defense.

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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum set the 2009 theme to be “Never Again: What You Do Matters.” The theme is about the people who said “no” to the inhumane cruelties perpetrated upon the Jews by the criminal Nazi regime of the Third Reich. Those who said “no” to the inhumane treatments of the Jews were also called rescuers or liberators. They rescued the Jews by hiding these hunted people in their homes, feeding them, helping them escape to neutral or Allied territory, and by revealing to the outside world the German’s final solution to the Jewish question of genocide. These rescuers risked their homes and property, their lives and their families’ lives. If they were caught by the Gestapo, the official secret police of Nazi Germany, then the savior of the Jew would be imprisoned, tortured, hanged or shot, and some would suffer the same fate as the persecuted by being stuffed in a cattle train car and deported to a labor camp such as Auschwitz. Such a place as Auschwitz was not a labor camp; it was a lie the Nazis created so as to lessen the Jewish resistance of deportation. In truth, it was a death camp in which the entrance sign cynically read “Arbeit mach frei” (Work sets you free). Freedom at Auschwitz meant death and these brave rescuers were a minority out of a majority.

So what made this saving minority different from the majority? What moved them to risk their property, their loved ones’ lives and their own life? Characteristics that made them different from the majority are discussed in this paper. In this discussion, a slight distinction is made between the terms rescuer and liberator even though both can overlap in their actions of saving people. A rescuer, for the purpose of this paper, is one who lives in Nazi controlled territory and removes the persecuted Jew from immediate harm by allowing the refugee or refugees long-term assistance by secretly hiding them in their homes, or in the short-term by providing assistance to the Jewish person or persons in their journey to a neutral country or allied controlled territory. In most cases, the rescuer is not involved in an open armed conflict with the Nazis, but is one who

stealthily gives aid to their Jewish comrades in the hope of not being netted by the Gestapo or the Schutzstaffel (SS), a Nazi organization under Hitler, and placed in death squads in Eastern Europe. The liberator is one who frees the refugee or refugees from immediate harm often through open armed conflict.

The format of this discussion is a book review of five different books. The first three books are about those individuals who made the decision to be rescuers and save their fellow human beings. The fourth book is about liberators who raided a train bound for Auschwitz. The fifth book, for contrast, is about the common German who committed the atrocities against the Jews.

*Rescuers Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*

If there ever were a college survey course on the rescuers of the Holocaust victims, then this book would be its textbook. Gay Block and Malka Drucker team up with their complimentary talents and create this book that pictorially captures the spirit of the rescuers with great story telling of the rescuers short narratives. Gay Block was a portrait photographer since 1975. She was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Her work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 255). Malka Drucker authored multiple award-winning children books such as *Eliezer Ben Yehuda: Father of Modern Hebrew*, which received the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Janusz Korczak Prize (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 255).

The format of the book's chapters at the beginning of each chapter is a summary of how citizens of a particular country, controlled by the Nazis, treated their fellow Jewish compatriots or Jewish refugees from other countries. In the chapter summary is a map of the country in

question that names the major cities and areas that played a part in the Holocaust. Then after each summary, the various rescuers of the particular country being discussed in the chapter tell their stories. It is the reliving of their first-hand experiences of the Holocaust that we learn of the rescuers' integrity to say "no" to evil and their compassion for their fellow human beings. A picture begins to form and suggest that these rescuers have certain traits that made them different from the majority population living under the yoke of the Nazis. At the end of the book is an appendix entitled *Righteous Among the Nations by Country and Ethnic Origin, January 1991* that shows the number of rescuers in the various countries (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 252). This appendix is reproduced at the end of this paper.

In the introduction of the book, written by Malka Drucker, she writes:

Nehama Tee, a professor of sociology who has researched compassion and altruism, explained at a recent conference held to examine the experience of children hidden during the war that rescuers come from "all walks of life, all religious and political affiliations, and all family configurations." Although, she has found no pattern here, she sees "a set of interdependent characteristics and conditions" that Holocaust rescuers share:

1. They don't blend into their communities. This makes them less controlled by their environments and more inclined to act on their own principles.
2. They are independent people and they know it. They do what they feel they must do, what is right, and the right thing is to help others.
3. They have a long history of doing good deeds. (Tee has interviewed child survivors, whose rescuers were usually mature people. Our rescuers were

much younger, most not over twenty-five during the war, so they had little chance earlier to demonstrate this characteristic.)

4. Because they have done the right thing for a long time, it doesn't seem extraordinary to them. If you consider something your duty, you do it automatically.
5. They choose to help without rational consideration.
6. They have universalistic perceptions that transcend race and ethnicity. They can respond to the needy and helpless because they identify with victims of injustice (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 5–6).

In countries where the Jews were an integral part of the majority population, they fared better than in those countries where they were not part of the general society of the country. An example of a western country was in northwestern Europe, the Netherlands, which claimed more rescuers than any other country during WWII. “As of January 1, 1991, Yal Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, had honored 9,295 Christians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. With 3,372 rescuers, Holland claimed more rescuers than any other country,” (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 19). Even though the Netherlands had the most rescuers, no other country in the West lost so much of its Jewish citizens. Blocker & Drucker expressed that “Eighty to ninety percent of Holland’s Jews, over 100,000, were killed” (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 19).

With all those rescuers in Holland, how could they have lost so many Jews in Holland? Some will say that the countryside is flat with few trees and was difficult to hide fugitives fleeing the Nazis. The flat geography does not explain the huge percentage of Dutch Jews losing their lives. The sad truth is that Dutch civil employees complied with their German masters. Another reason is that 80,000 Dutch citizens were members of the National Socialist Party (NSB), a

fascist party akin to the German Nazis (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 20). Many others wanted the huge amount of bounty money the Germans paid informants. Many Dutch citizens were afraid of the resultant consequences if they were caught harboring Jews.

One Dutch couple that faced the odds and was part of the 3,372 Dutch rescuers was Johannes and Janke DeVries (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 22–26). The authors, Block & Drucker, interviewed Mr. DeVries for his wife recently passed away at the time of the interview. The compassionate couple took into their home two Jewish children, Shlomo and Eva Harrington, during WWII. In order to avoid being captured by the Nazis it was common practice by the rescuers to temporarily change the Jewish sounding names to more “Christian” or Dutch sounding names. Shlomo and Eva became Bobby and Eef.

Johannes recalled that when he was being raised that “The rules in our family were we couldn’t lie, steal, or kill, and we had to help the elderly and children. Otherwise, we grew up free...” (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 22). He knew in the 1930s that many German Jews left Germany to live in the Netherlands. When the Germans invaded Holland, they bombed Rotterdam in 1940. One result of that bombing was that many children became homeless. The children were given homes throughout Holland. One of the children was Shlomo (aka Bobby) is who they gave shelter to after a woman approached Johannes and Janke to take in the Jewish boy.

They gave refuge to the boy under the subterfuge that he was one of the homeless children from Rotterdam. Mr. DeVries said that one of the reasons they risked their lives was that if he and his wife did not help the young Jewish boy in 1942 and if they discovered that the Nazis executed the boy, the young couple would have had that killing on their conscious for the rest of their lives. It would be too much for them to bare.. They fell in love with the child and

treated him no differently than their own children. They loved the boy so much that later through some inquires Johannes and Janke found Eva, Bobby's sister. Bobby was very excited that day when he was united with his sister.

The harboring of these two Jewish children in occupied Holland was no easy task. The underground promised to provide food stamps but the stamps did not always arrive. Johannes would risk his life and go to the town of Friesland to buy food. Such an activity was dangerous, for the Nazis were always vigilant in their "sacred" mission of ethnic cleansing of the Jew. The Dutch Nazis were the worst for they were an unknown entity.

Several years after the war, in 1977, Johannes and Janke went to Israel to receive an award for their rescue effort on behalf of those two Jewish children. When they returned from Israel they felt proud of their awards and they showed them to the neighbors. One neighbor said they committed a great sin for the Jews killed Christ. Johannes responded to the neighbor by telling the neighbor that they did not read their Bible very well for it was the Romans who killed Christ.

In Eastern Europe the Jews were not assimilated in the mainstream culture. They dressed differently, spoke a different language known as Yiddish, and they lived in separate communities. The East, namely Poland and Russia or the Soviet Union, had a long violent history of anti-Semitism. When Russia became the atheist Communist state known as the Soviet Union in 1917, it granted equal status to the Jews. When Stalin and Hitler signed their secret nonaggression pact on August 23, 1939, it set the stage for WWII and the deadly fate of many Polish Jews was sealed. Shortly thereafter, in September that same year, Hitler invades Poland from the west and Stalin invades from the east. While the Soviet Union remained neutral, until

the Nazis invaded in June 1941, 300,000 Polish Jews went east to Soviet occupied Poland (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 236).

In the Soviet Union at the outbreak of WWII there were "...more than three million Jews in the Soviet Union, half in the Ukraine" (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 236). When the Germans invaded the U.S.S.R., the Ukrainians welcomed the Germans as liberators from the yoke of Stalin. The feeling did not last very long for Hitler treated the Slavic peoples as an inferior race and the Nazis were equally as oppressive as Stalin. Before Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, "...no Jewish community had lost more than 2 or 3 percent of its population, and Western Europe had not yet lost any Jews" (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 236). In Eastern Europe, the Nazis had willing fellow bullies, especially the Lithuanians and Ukrainians. These fellow collaborators with Nazi Germany committed mass murder by shooting 33,000 Jews at Babi Yar, Ukraine in only forty-eight hours (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 236). The Jewish people whose life was not taken by the bullet were forced to live in subhuman conditions known as ghettos in cities such as Riga, Vilna, and Minsk (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 236). By 1945, when the Allies were victorious over Nazi Germany, Russia had lost over 1 million Jews and the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) experienced a 90 percent loss of Jewish lives out of 250,000 (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 236).

Amfian Gerasimov, born in Riga, Latvia in 1902, was no fellow bully of the Jews (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 246–249). As a teenager he witnessed the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the atheistic Communist overthrow of the Czar, this would be rescuer was bewildered as to why the Communist rejected God. His family was Russian Orthodox Christians, but Amfian did not settle for just Orthodoxy. He felt a lack of security in his family and in the Orthodox faith so in 1925, Amfian researched other faiths to find the degree of security he desired.

When Gerasimov was growing up with his family in Riga, he did not have personal contact with the Jews in his hometown. It was only later in the midst of his research of other faiths that Amfian learned about Judaism. The sojourner for the truth came to know that Christianity and Judaism both based their beliefs in the Bible. Gerasimov told to the authors that he lived by the Bible. In 1928, he married his wife, who was also a fellow sojourner of the truth. In his intellectual pursuits of the truth, Amfian explored the negation of God espoused by the atheistic Communists and for him he didn't discover truth in that, so his conclusion was that truth is found in religion and that God does exist.

The first personal interlude Amfian Gerasimov had with a Jewish person was his landlady, Mrs. Brill (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 246). Initially, Amfian and Mrs. Brill were of two different social classes. Amfian describes himself as a poor mailman and it goes without saying that Mrs. Brill's family was of the well-to-do property owner class. The Communist eradicated these social distinctions in 1941. Since they were proclaimed equals by the government, it made it possible for Amfian's family to be personally involved with his landlady's family.

One day Mrs. Brill disappeared from their apartment complex located on an island near Riga. Soon after her disappearance Mrs. Brill's daughters, Lela and Dora and their families, were evicted from their large apartments downtown and moved into a smaller apartment located one floor above Gerasimov's apartment. Amfian recalled that life was hard for his family, but his new neighbors had it worse. Lela and Dora were both married and each of them had two daughters apiece, thus, there were eight people living in one apartment. That was only the beginning; a few months later the Nazis were forcing all the Jews in that area into a ghetto "... of only six or seven small streets, an area of two square kilometers" (Block & Drucker, 1992, p.

246). Lela and Dora left a couple of suitcases in which they made arrangements with Amfian to bring them care packages from time to time to the ghetto. Amfian allowed other members of his family to deliver those care packages to the ghetto until the Nazis cordoned off the Jewish neighborhood with barbed wire. Once the ghetto was enclosed, it became more risky and complicated to help his Jewish friends. He always wore his postal uniform and carried their parcels in his mail pouch. In his own words, “These poor people were moved constantly and when they could get messages to me, I met them wherever they told me” (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 246).

As time went on, Gerasimov met with the persecuted ones, by bribing one of the guards, as they were returning to the ghetto from their daily forced labor. It was at these clandestine appointments that Amfian would deliver items they needed, exchange news to each other, and he would listen to the daily cruel treatment their Nazi handlers gave them. On one of these terrible evening returns from the forced labor, the Germans killed Dora Brill and her two children, “... took them outside the city together with the old, the sick, and the children, and murdered them without mercy” (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 248).

Amfian was still able to meet with his former landlady’s only surviving daughter and her husband, Lela Brill and Asak Mizrah. They continued to meet until Asak was deported and executed by the Nazi perpetrators. On one of these occasions, Gerasimov was stopped by one of the German guards and Amfian was terribly frightened. As scarred as he was, Amfian had the presence of mind to convince the German inquisitors that he was only a postman delivering the mail.

Amfian Gerasimov not only left his home and went out delivering the much-needed packages to the Jewish captives, but he opened his home secretly to allow a Jewish refugee to

live. The refugee was Gary Nis, the son-in-law of Lela Brill. He recalls that at the time he was hiding Mr. Nis, the “Eastern Front” was approaching. Amfian sent his family to safety in the countryside that provided the space for Mr. Nis to live at his home. Once the Russians arrived, Gary Nis joined the Red Army to fight the Germans.

Several years later after the war, Amfian converted to Judaism and he wanted to live in Israel. Unfortunately for him his wife did not want to leave the Soviet Union and the Soviet government would not allow him to leave unless his wife went with him. Finally in 1975 he is allowed to leave the U.S.S.R. and migrate to Israel. His life in Israel was no heaven on earth. Many of his Israeli neighbors asked him is he Jewish or Russian. He would always reply that he is a Jew who believes that Jesus is the Messiah. Many of his neighbors did not care for his beliefs and he received death threats by some. The Israeli government put a halt to such threats.

Many people he came in contact would ask him why he risked his life and he would say:

I answer them by quoting the Bible, the New Testament, John, chapter 15: There is no greater love than sacrificing your own soul for another’s soul.’ And of course, this passage comes directly from the Old Testament, Proverbs, Chapter 24. (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 249)

Not all Germans were perpetrators of the Nazi-led Holocaust. In Hitler’s own dark backyard, the German Reich, there existed human rays of hope that rescued Jewish people from the Nazi concentration death camps. One of those few German rescuers was Gitta Bauer (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 136–141). In Gitta’s upbringing she was exposed to more than one religious or political point of view. Her father was a Protestant liberal Social Democrat and her mother was a Catholic who voted for the centrist Catholic Party.

Her father took her to art museums until the Nazi Regime banned modern art in 1933. Her familial liberal education was the antithesis to the oppressive environment created by Hitler and his cronies.

Gitta's parents were very much anti-Nazis. Gitta recalls the time when she asked her father about the Jews:

“What are Jews?” he said, “Jews are people like you and me only with a different religion. And that's it.” That was the rule in our family. We knew so many Jews and they were no threat to us. (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 136)

Her father's answer was very revealing about her family's attitude and beliefs about the Jews. It was directly contrary to the Nazi dogma that Jews were an inferior race unlike the German master race. Her parent's notions made it possible for her to be a rescuer of Jews.

Gitta revealed that her aunt had many Jewish friends and that she met them all. This aunt had a particular Jewish friend who she helped to move the friend and her family to Amsterdam. This friend had a twin sister who came to Gitta in 1944 to ask her to help her daughter who was in dire straits. In Gitta's words:

What else could I say but “I'll take her into my home”? This was no big moral or religious decision. She was a friend and she needed help. We knew it was dangerous, and we were careful, but we didn't consider not taking her. Her name was Ilse Baumgart; I was twenty-four and she was twenty-one...Ilse lived with me for nine months, until the end of the war. (Block & Drucker, 1992, p. 138–139)

The three above examples of rescuers from the Netherlands, Soviet Union, and Germany is a small snapshot of the book. The book also covers rescuers from: Belgium, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. *Rescuers Portraits of Moral*

*Courage in the Holocaust* is a treasure cove of memories from people who lived saving Jewish persons from evil.

*Karski: How One Man Tried To Stop the Holocaust*

The book, *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*, is the result of collaboration between an American writer, E. Thomas Wood, and a Polish writer, Stanislaw M. Jankowski. According to the back cover flap, Mr. Wood is a reporter for the *Tennessean* in Nashville and Mr. Jankowski's profession is being a journalist, an historian, and a leading authority of the Polish underground during WWII. The book is based on the recollections of Jan Karski's experiences of WWII as a member of the Polish underground resistance and its ensuing human tragedies. The authors separately interview Mr. Karski in Polish and English. The writers had over forty taped hours of Karski's incredible recall of those terrible times. The journalists interviewed other persons who could verify and substantiate Karski's information. They also sought other sources such as libraries in various countries involved in WWII. The authors' stated goal on the preface page reads:

Our goal has been to convey all the excitement and moral force of Jan Karski's wartime activities while simultaneously presenting a clear and well-documented record of those experiences. (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. ix)

Jan Karski was born in 1914 as Jan Kozielski. His name change will be explained later in the paper. Jan grew-up in the Polish city Lodz where his father, Stefan Kozielski, owned a small tannery. His father died when Jan was quite young. The two key people in Jan's upbringing was his mother, Walentyna Kozielska (Polish feminine ending of Kozielski), and his elder brother, Marian Kozielski, eighteen years Jan's senior. Marian became a father figure for his younger brother, Jan. Marian was instrumental in advising and guiding Jan's

education and career. His mother gave Jan a deep appreciation of his Catholic faith. Walentyna encouraged social tolerance and friendly relation with the Jews in his community in Lodz His mother missed the intense cruelty of the German Holocaust of WWII because she died in 1935.

When Jan was attending a local elementary school in Lodz, encouraged by his mother and the Jesuit priests teachers in his school, Jan displayed “near-fanatical devotion to his Catholic faith” (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 9). He joined a boy’s semisecret society, Sodalicja Marianska, whose aim in to honor the Virgin Mary:

The boys spent hours under the tutelage of an excitable priest, studying artists’ portrayals of the Blessed Virgin, Adam and Eve, and other biblical figures. The priest lectured over and over about the contrast between Mary’s purity and Eve’s wickedness, interpolating stern warnings to the boys to avoid evil women like Eve (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 9).

When Karski was a young man at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwow in the mid-thirties, Jan befriended many Jewish students. At the same time Poland was exhibiting its own anti-Semitism, there were “numerous [sic] clauses campaign, designed to reduce the prominence of Jews in professional positions by discouraging or preventing them from attending universities...” (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 38). In many of the classes Polish nationalist students were intimidating Jewish students by forcing them to sit or stand in the back of class. The university became a battlefield of right-wing Polish nationalist demonstrations and counter demonstrations by students who supported the Jewish cause. Violence would often occur on campus and the Jew haters beat a Catholic friend of Karski, Jerzy Lerski, but Karski kept silent:

Jan himself, however, carefully avoided any public involvement with Jewish cause, despite his disgust with the anti-Semitism permeating the university. He knew that

diplomats had to steer clear of domestic political entanglements to maintain their impartial standing within the government. And besides, as he later joked, ‘those thugs might disfigure my face, and I wouldn’t be an attractive ambassador.’ . . . Jan’s silence in the face of evil at the university would long haunt him. ‘I simply did not want to get involved,’ he would ruefully comment as an older man. When the chance arose, some years after college, to compensate for his inaction by coming to the aid of threatened Jews, Jan would seize the opportunity. (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 38–39)

When WWII broke out in September 1939 and Poland was overrun by the Germans in the west and the Soviets in the east, Karski became a prisoner of the Soviets and was imprisoned in central Ukraine. Life in a Soviet prison was rather rugged to put it mildly. In the prison camp, officers were given menial tasks such as cooking and latrine duty. Since Karski was a lieutenant, he was placed with the officers. The enlisted personnel had better conditions than the officers. In late October 1939, the Germans and the Soviets agreed to a prisoner exchange involving only privates. Those prisoners who were born of German descent or were from the German occupied Poland were given to the Germans. Those Polish POWs held by the Germans who were of Ukrainian or Byelorussian was to be released to the Soviets. The only thing Karski had that gave him away as an officer was his boots. He befriended a private and he traded his boots for the inferior boots worn by Polish privates. Karski and two thousand fellow Poles were released and set on train headed back to Poland (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 21).

German hospitality was harsher than the Soviet prison camp. The Germans were quite insulting by calling their Polish prisoners “Polish Swine.” The Nazis gave them meager amounts of food with no nutritional value. They slept on cold hard floors with no blankets to shield them from the frigid Polish winter of 1939–1940. Many of the POWs died of exposure and disease;

the German guards beat their Polish inmates and some were just shot to death. The only relief the Polish prisoners received was by care packages of food and medicine thrown over the barbed wire fence by an unknown caregiver. It was in one of those packages Karski discovered a note that read that he would be leaving the prison camp for a few days to do forced labor. Jan then began to plan his escape from the Nazis.

Jan and his fellow captured countrymen were put in cattle train cars. There was an advantage for the future escapee in the cattle cars over the boxcars used to transport POWs. The ventilation windows of the cattle car were about a foot high and opened at eye level instead of opening at the top of the car. Jan decided to jump the train but the ventilation windows were too high to jump out without assistance. Karski felt that jumping out of the train alone would also cause reprisals to his fellow prisoners. Another problem for the would-be escape artist was that the Germans had machine guns in the front cars and back cars of the train, as well as bright search lights strategically placed on the roofs of the cattle cars.

Karski was able to convince three of his compatriots to escape with him. One of these Polish prisoners knew the lay of the land and informed Jan about a forest they would be entering on the train route. When the time to escape was drawing near, Karski announced to his fellow car mates that he was an officer and that he had information about a powerful Polish army in the woods. Karski also said that he and three other men were going to escape and join that army. There was not a Polish army; Karski had told a “white” lie to inspire the men to escape. The air in the cattle car became dramatic:

The response to this oratory was not overwhelming. Several of the men in the car objected that they would be shot for Jan’s escape. Some argued that the Germans would treat everyone well if they just behaved themselves. But enough others sided with Jan to

shout down the opposition. Twelve men, including Jan, prepared to jump from the train, while others volunteered to throw them out (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 23).

There were three advantages the Polish POWs had: it was at night and raining with a forest to help conceal them from their German keepers. The first human projectile out of the cattle car was undetected by the Germans. The next four men to be hurled out were seen by the Germans and machine gun fire could be heard coming from the train. Jan then ordered the men to keep ejecting men out of the train until the train halted. The train never stopped and Jan was the last human to be launched from the train into the ensuing wet, freezing darkness. There was no way to be sure how many survived that escape because it was dark and the escapee could not remain to discover any survivors for fear of German patrols scouting for escaped prisoners. The first priority was to flee rapidly as possible from the scene. So Jan Karski successfully escaped from the Nazis and headed towards Warsaw.

In Warsaw he secretly met with his brother, Marian Koziński, the chief of police. His brother was clandestinely a part of the underground resistance. Marian arranged for Jan to meet with the local leaders of the various groups fighting the Nazis. The political realities of the underground were that it was comprised of different competing political groups. Throughout Karski's interaction with the resistance he always maintained his independence and non-involvement in their political quarrels. Since Jan knew several foreign languages and was a diplomat before the war, the resistance decided to send him all over Poland and then arrange to send Karski to France to report to the Polish government-in-exile about the conditions in Poland. In 1940, Poland was divided in three ways. The most western part of Poland is annexed into the Reich. It was those territories in Poland that were part of Germany before 1918. The Germans controlled the central part of Poland as well and the administrative government was known as the

General Government. The eastern part of Poland was controlled by the Soviets. The two areas controlled by the Germans were easier for Jan to get around because of Marian's position as police chief in Warsaw. Marian could send Jan under the ruse of doing police business. Karski did visit the eastern part of Poland but how he did it is still unknown.

When the Nazis first conquered Poland, the final solution of the Jewish question was not yet formulated. In the early months of the war, no one knew that mass murder of Jews by the Germans would occur in Poland. The German overlords gradually enacted laws to make Jewish life in Poland ultimately unbearable:

...in October (1939), a law forbidding Kosher food preparation; in late November, a decree requiring all Jews to wear armbands emblazoned with the Star of David; in January (1940), forced registration of Jewish-owned property; and so on (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 35).

In Karski's report to the government-in-exile about his observations of the annexed western part of Poland, he told of how the Germans were cleansing the "Reich" of Jews and sending them east to the General Government's territories and some were just killed. It was in Lublin, a city on the eastern part of the General Government, that Jan observed the initial start of the genocide of the Jewish people. Jan Reports:

Forced to sing humiliating songs while carrying out their exercises, the victims were also subjected to constant taunting and physical abuse from the Germans. In freezing weather, the Jews were doused with cold water. Old people fainted from shock or exhaustion.

Young boys were stripped naked, mocked, and threatened by the guards. "The 'Master Race' is truly a nation of madmen, of brutal haters, and heartless creatures," Jan wrote of the event (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 35).

The above incident was not an isolated case. All over in Poland the Germans were treating Jews worse than animals. In Warsaw, Jan witnessed a German soldier walk up to a Jewish peddler and put various items in his pocket and walks off without paying for them. The peddler chases the soldier and demands payment but the German ignores him. The other Jews nearby tried to stop the peddler for fear for his life. The peddler yelled out, “What can he do to me?... He can only kill me. Let him kill me. Enough of all this. I can’t go on anymore” (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 35–36). The German heard the peddler yelling and he just glares at him and said, “Goddamned Jews” and he walked away (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 36).

Another incident happened when Jan went to Gestapo headquarters to get a pass. While he was there, Jan saw a pregnant woman begging for permission to be out after curfew so that she could receive medical attention if she went into labor during the forbidden hours. The Jewish woman received no mercy, no kindness, only hatred and anger:

A German secretary berated the woman: “You don’t need a pass! We’re not going to make it easy for you to give birth to a Jew. Dogs are dying from hunger and misery, and you still want to give birth to Jews? Out! Out!” (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 36)

By the time Karski completed his tour of the country, he was ready to leave to report to the government-in-exile in Paris. When he left Poland he took on assumed names so as to disguise his identity. If the Germans caught him and they learned that his real family name was Kozielski, it would endanger his brother Marian and his strategic position as police chief in Warsaw. In fact, it was during his second trip out of Poland in 1942 that he left to go to England and eventually the U.S. under the name of Jan Karski. Since he applied for a diplomatic visa in his visit to the U.S. in 1943 under the name of Jan Karski, he kept the name and used it after the war in the U.S. He had a lingering fear that he might be deported to Communist Poland for

entering the country under a false identity. When he was granted American citizenship in 1954, he could not use his birth name (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 262).

After Jan returned to Poland after his first trip to France, the situation for Polish Jews deteriorated rapidly. There were two sets of experiences that Karski was an eyewitness to that were poignant to the Jewish plight at the hands of the Nazis. They included his visit to the Warsaw Ghetto and a death camp. It was the hope of the desperate Jewish resistance leaders that when Karski went on his trip to London in November 1942, that he would reveal to the British and Americans the deathly conditions the Jewish people were suffering under. It would take more than just detailed accounts of the hellish events happening to the Polish Jews, for the Jewish underground leaders gave such reports to the British and they did not believe them. They suggested that Jan see for himself firsthand what evil the Nazis created for the Jews. Karski agreed to the visitations.

The Germans placed the Warsaw Ghetto in the worst place in the city. The buildings were old and in disrepair. The streets were narrow and jammed with starving people and littered naked human corpses. The air was nothing but the stench of death and the dying. In Karski's own words:

There was hardly a square yard of empty space... As we picked our way across the mud and rubble, the shadows of what had once been men or women flitted by us in pursuit of someone or something, their eyes blazing with some insane hunger or greed. (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 122)

The sounds of the Warsaw Ghetto were filled by the mad driven by hunger. There were some who were trying to trade clothing for food.

Karski was bewildered about all the naked dead bodies in the street. His Jewish guides tell him that when a person died in the ghetto the family removed the clothing and the body placed into the streets or they paid the Germans a burial tax. When Karski's party reached the Plac Muranowski, a square located in the northeast corner of the Ghetto that once was a park, they saw:

Mothers crowded the benches, nursing emaciated infants. Stunted children filled the area, some sitting listlessly, others cavorting in the dirt. "They are playing, you see." Jan thought he heard Feiner's (Jewish resistance leader) voice break with emotion. "Life goes on. They play before they die... These children are not playing," responded Jan. "They only make believe it is play." (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 122)

His Jewish guides took Jan from one macabre scene after another. In some cases they could only know a person was alive by the rising and descending of a person's chest in the act of breathing.

One of the most horrific acts by the Germans that Jan witnessed in the Warsaw Ghetto was the hunting of the Jews by two young German boys of the Hitler Youth. People were scrambling and shrieking in fear as they raced to hide. The youth's behavior was the ultimate sign that Nazi Germany was a totally corrupt society. These two Hitler Youth boys were doing something gruesome but in their eyes they were doing their duty. Only a corrupt society could turn innocent children into genocidal murderers.

A couple of days after Jan's visit of the Warsaw Ghetto, Karski went on a trip to a Nazi death camp controlled by the Germans with Ukrainian militiamen who served as guards. Jan was taken by his Jewish contact to a hardware store in a small town in the country, east of Lublin. The owner of the store was a member of the resistance. There was a Ukrainian militiaman's

uniform waiting for Jan in the hardware store. The owner of the uniform was bribed to take the day off. Jan met a Ukrainian guard who also was bribed to take Jan to the camp.

As they approached the camp by foot, it was surrounded with camouflaged barbed wire twelve feet high. The death camp was quite a large area. Inside the area cordoned off by the barbed wire fence were a few small barracks. There was a “walled wooded ramp” that extended from the camp to the railroad tracks. When Jan and his Ukrainian guide arrived at one of the gates, the guide lazily saluted the two German overlords and they casually let Jan and the Ukrainian into the camp.

Once inside the camp, Karski could see the large scale of human suffering. This was what Jan saw in the camp:

Spread out before Jan was a broad, open space. To Jan, it seemed to be completely covered by “a dense, pulsating, throbbing, noisy human mass” of “starved, stinking, gesticulating, insane” Jews. Of all ages and both genders, some in various states of undress, the captives sat and lay on the ground. Like the stupefied figures slumped along the Ghetto’s streets, many of these victims appeared to be in shock. Here and there in the vast crowd-there must have been thousands-a guard was beating or kicking a Jew. (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 125)

Jan surmised that these Jews exchanged their existence from the Ghetto to a few days of “confinement in sealed boxcars without food, water, or sanitary facilities, followed by further torments and neglect upon their arrival” to the death camp (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 126). Karski was wrong about where these Jews were from, but he was correct in how they were treated. The Ukrainian that escorted Jan into the camp revealed to Karski that the prisoners were allowed fifteen kilograms of personal effects. At the camp these last personal belongings were

confiscated away from them. Then, "...they were left under the elements until the system was ready to deal with them (the Jews) further" (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 126).

Behind the suffering mass of humanity were the boxcars lined up on the train tracks. Jan could see the Ukrainian guards lining the cars with quicklime, calcium oxide. At a signal from the German overlord the Ukrainians began to herd the Jews into the boxcars lined with quicklime:

The guards moved steadily forward against the chaotic mass of flesh, striking out with clubs and rifle butts to force the victims toward the ramp leading to the boxcar doors, shooting and bayoneting any too weak or traumatized to move... The low moan of misery that emanated from the crowd on the ground gave way first to shrieks of pure panic as the Jews stumbled up the ramp, then to echoing wails of agony as they were packed into the boxcars and felt the quicklime burning their skin and lungs. The guards fired at random into the crowd on the ramp, hurling the dead and wounded into the car to land on the heads of those already packed in. When no more bodies could be crammed into a car, a Ukrainian slammed its iron doors shut, crushing any protruding limbs. (Wood & Jankowski, 1994, p. 126)

When Jan saw all of the cruelty exhibited on the Jews, he lost control of his emotions. He began weeping and gesticulating and his Ukrainian guide angrily collected Jan and he took him back to the hardware store. Upon arrival to the store, Jan made a beeline to the bathroom in which Jan was trying to clean himself. The death camp made him feel dirty. Karski immediately went outside and vomits and then falls asleep under a tree. He awakened later in a cold sweat and vomited again and then repeats it until he vomited blood. Later he asked the hardware proprietor for vodka in which he drank deeply hoping to get relief from the day's excursion into evil.

When Jan went to England and America to report on the German atrocities perpetrated upon the Jews he witnessed, many could not believe what they were hearing. An American Jewish Supreme Court Justice, Felix Frankfurter, found Karski's story unbelievable. Frankfurter was not the only official who did not believe Jan, but he was the most important official. Jan Karski was not a rescuer of Jews by hiding Jewish individuals in his home, but he was a rescuer for he tried to rescue all European Jews from the Holocaust by exposing the Nazis for what they were-mass murderers. He had hoped that the Germans would think twice before committing genocide if the Allies knew the extent of the murders.

*The Assisi Underground: The Priests Who Rescued Jews as told by Padre Rufino Niccacci*

Alexander Ramati, the author, was a war correspondent during WWII. He was one of the first journalists to reach the historical city of Assisi with the Allies. Ramati, at the time the book was published wrote two novels, "*Beyond the Mountains* and *Rebel Against the Light* and a study of *Israel Today*" (Ramati, 1978, back cover flap). According to the back cover flap, Ramati completed work in films for Paramount and CBS-TV, was an independent writer, producer, director, and an educator in film writing at the University of Tel Aviv. The book was about the rescuers of Assisi and read like a movie script that was written in the first person that engaged the reader in a conversation with Padre Rufino, the narrator of the book. An interesting aspect of the book was the point of view the Franciscan Catholic priest provided in the narrative. The religious beliefs of Padre Rufino were very much a part of his reality and those beliefs determined his actions during the war.

The events recounted by Padre Rufino took place in Italy, a fascist country, during WWII. The narrator began with the date September 10, 1943 when the Germans took Rome. The events surrounding that date were an intense time for Italy. Due to the fact that the war for Italy

was going badly, there was much discontent aimed at Il Duce, Benito Mussolini, by much of the Italian populace. With the defeat of the Axis powers in North Africa on May 13, 1943, the Allied invasion of Sicily on July 10, 1943, Rome being bombed for the first time on July 19, 1943, and the fall of Palermo on July 22, 1943, the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, removed Mussolini from his post and arrested him on July 25, 1943. Marshal Pietro Badoglio replaced Mussolini.

Since the Germans were in the northern half of Italy in large numbers, the new Prime Minister of Italy, Badoglio, proclaimed that Italy would remain loyal to its Axis ally, Germany. Meanwhile, the Italians foresaw an Allied victory, thus Badoglio secretly negotiated with the Anglo-Americans for an armistice. On September 3, 1943, the Allies invaded the Italian mainland and an armistice was secretly signed on the same day. The armistice was made public on September 8, 1943. The events only enraged Hitler so he occupied the northern half of Italy and occupied Rome two days after the armistice between the Italians and the Allies was made public. It was the time when Padre Rufino says the war came to him.

Before September 10, 1943, Padre Rufino only experienced the Germans as tourists. The Padre expressed the hope that the Germans, after their occupation of Italy, would continue to be only tourists. Padre Rufino was somewhat reassured that when the Germans occupied Rome, they stopped at the gate of the Vatican, an independent country. It seemed to him that no one was disturbed by increased German tourists because they always left large cash donations to the local churches and shrines.

Padre Rufino admitted that the town of Assisi had its followers of Il Duce. The local citizens are described by Padre Rufino as:

...they were all local citizens whom we knew well, good Catholics, who meant no harm to us...Our Mayor, Avvocato Arnaldo Fortini, for example, had taken part in the

Blackshirts' march to Rome in 1922, but he was also President of the International Society for Franciscan Studies and wrote many books about St. Francis. And there was Signor Imperatore, in charge of the Fascist House, the Party's headquarters; Marshal Vivi, the commander of the Carabinieri; Pietro Coggoli, the pharmacist and councillor; and Ortensio Pagliacci, the city's chief accountant and head of the Blackshirts. They were the leaders and their views were shared by half of the city; which meant that two thousand people were for Mussolini, two thousand against him, and the rest were not involved in secular affairs. The rest were ourselves—one thousand monks, nuns and priests. (Ramati, 1978, p. 1)

It was just a few hours after Padre Rufino heard the bad news about the fall of Rome to the Germans, that the bishop summoned him to his residence at midnight. Bishop Giuseppe Placido Nicolini, O.S.B., of St. Benedict, had an urgent task for Padre Rufino. The bishop informed the Padre that he had refugees in his residence. They are not the ordinary refugee, but are Jews who fled Rome that fateful day in September 1943. Bishop Nicolini wanted Padre Rufino to take these Jewish persons to Cardinal Elia della Costa, the Archbishop of Florence. Cardinal della Costa would then send them onto Genoa where Cardinal Pietro Boetto might be able to get them on a ship registered under a neutral country and get the refugees out of harm's way. Cardinal Boetto had a reputation of being able to get the Jews out of the country to safety and it was the hope of the rescuers that he would repeat such a feat.

In case they were stopped by the Germans or the Organizzazione Volontaria Repressione Antifascista (OVRA), the Fascist secret police (Ramati, 1978, p. 1–2), the bishop gave Padre Rufino a letter and told him to read it. The letter said that the people accompanying Padre Rufino were Christians journeying back to their homes from a pilgrimage to Assisi. The letter was

signed by the bishop over his seal. Padre Rufino had wondered why the bishop picked him to do this trek. Bishop Nicolini replied, "...you are the only friar in town who would not lose his head when questioned by the OVRA or the Gestapo. You are my uomo di fiducia, my man of trust" (Ramati, 1978, p. 6). It was the first of many rescue missions that would involve Padre Rufino.

His next mission in saving Jewish lives would be closer to home. In this case, Bishop Nicolini informed Padre Rufino of twenty Jews in Perugia that were waiting to receive help in Assisi. The bishop saw the need to hide them locally in the Assisi area with "proper papers" because the Germans were vigorously checking everywhere for Jews. They escaped from the Nazi roundup in Trieste and were transported in three taxis owned by Geremia del Bianco. Geremia was under the impression that he was providing transportation of Catholic refugees from Perugia. Their route to Assisi consisted of side roads because the Germans did not tolerate refugees clogging up the main roads that they used for military movements.

The three taxis came to the Poor Clares' Monastery of San Quirico located in the south central part of Assisi. The monastery had a guesthouse open to visitors. The plan was to hide the "refugees" in the guesthouse. A problem arose for it was the law of the land that visitors had to register by producing identity cards for the authorities to review and Padre Rufino and the twenty guests could not register for fear of being arrested. They could not register as Jews and the false identity papers was not yet produced that would yield consistent cover stories if they were questioned by the Gestapo or the OVRA. Padre Rufino had to speak to the Mother Abbess in order to get the refugees settled in the guesthouse without identity cards. When Padre Rufino told the Abbess that the would-be guests were Jews that the Germans wanted to kill, she was moved and wanted to help them as well. So the twenty Jews were given refuge in the guesthouse

without the surrendering of identity cards. All of this all occurred before the Germans occupied Assisi.

When the Germans came to Assisi, they instituted policies proclaimed on posters that demanded all citizens to surrender their arms within twenty-four hours under the penalty of death; curfew between dusk until dawn and anyone who violated the curfew would be shot; any act of sabotage, hindrance of military movement, or attack committed upon German personnel would be met by them getting shot. The mayor, Fortini, was expected to produce a list of twelve persons that the OVRA labeled as most suspect to serve as hostages. The German Luftwaffe (German air force) captain, Ernst Stolmann, told the mayor that for each single German life lost by an attack, then three hostages would be killed. Padre Rufino recalled that the fascist mayor was angry that the Germans were not treating Italy as a friendly ally but an occupied country. The next day Mayor Fortini, mayor of Assisi for twenty years, resigned.

On the first day the Germans arrived in Assisi, the first roundup and the intense hunt for Jews began. The Jews at San Quirico's guesthouse were in fatal danger. Padre Rufino rushed to the guesthouse to hide the Jews in the monastic cloister. Padre Rufino recalled the conversation he had with the Abbess:

...I was facing Mother Giuseppina (the Abbess) across the grilled window. 'Open these doors, Mother!' I said, pointing at the wooden door, protected by a double grille, to which only the Abbess and a nun-doorkeeper had the keys. 'What? That's the cloister.' 'Do you think I don't know that? Get all the Jews in there.' 'Men? Men in the cloister? In a female cloister? You're out of your mind, Father! We have all taken a vow of seclusion.' 'Then break it!' I snapped. The nun crossed herself. 'Never! Never in the seven hundred years, since Pope Innocent IV established our Order, has the Canonical

Enclosure been broken. In the Papal Bull, St. Clare in her own name, and in the name of her successors, promised obedience to the Pope and only the Pope can command me to break the vow.’ (Ramati, 1978, p. 25)

Padre Rufino was frustrated with the nun’s intransigence about a rule held to be an absolute over the lives of innocent people. Padre Rufino quickly went to Bishop Nicolini and brought the Bishop to the Abbess. Padre Rufino recalled:

... ‘Break the Enclosure, Mother,’ the bishop said crisply. ‘Let the Jews in.’ ‘I need the Pope’s order. Or the Cardinal’s.’ ‘...I’m the Pope’s representative in this diocese and I’m carrying out the Pope’s orders,’ Nicolini said. The nun opened her mouth, then clicked it shut. ‘I didn’t know Monsignore.’ She grabbed his hand through the opening in the grille and made her obeisance. (Ramati, 1978, p. 25–26)

As with many Catholics in religious orders, especially religious superiors, they tended to treat some rules as absolute and tied with one’s salvation. The Abbess wanted no harm to come to the Jews and wanted to do what she could to help shelter the Jews from the Germans. She also wanted to protect the monastery’s way of life. To allow men in the female cloister was felt by the Abbess to be an invasion to the nun’s interior life. The nuns took solemn vows to deny themselves the world and some of its carnal pleasures. Since letting men in the cloister was such a grave act, only the Pope could allow it. When she told Padre Rufino and the Bishop that only the Pope or the Cardinal could order her to open the cloister to men, she was giving the bishop a signal to allow her to help the Jews. The bishop picked up on that signal and said he was under the Pope’s orders and thus he ordered the Abbess to let the Jews in the cloister. The order gave the Abbess the out she needed to allow the Jewish men in the cloister. She was looking for a way to overcome an absolute rule to help her fellow human beings. She could have asked for written

proof or a written order by the Pope, but the Abbess did not and she acquiesced to the Bishop rather quickly. With the gates of the cloister opened for the Jews, the Germans found no Jews in Assisi.

As the war progressed in Italy, more Jews were sent to padre Rufino daily. How the system worked to save the Jews was to get them out of Italy via Cardinal Boetto of Genoa. He got the Jewish refugees onto neutral ships and Cardinal Della Costa of Florence furnished a network of parish priest to get the Jews to neutral Switzerland. An essential element in the saving process was to produce false identity cards that would fool the Gestapo and the OVRA. Padre Rufino turned to Luigi Brizi who had the means to make falsified documents to fool the Germans and their Italian fascist lackeys. Brizi and his son throughout the duration of the war created excellent fake identity cards in which the Germans never realized that they were falsified documents.

The result of Padre Rufino's organizing and the Brizi family's printing was:

Assisi saved three hundred Jews and many times that number if one counts the documents produced and delivered to survivors in other towns. And that record was so much greater because it was a city where no Jew ever lived before. It was a city that had saved strangers (Ramati, 1978, p. 173).

*The Twentieth Train: The True Story of the Ambush of the Death Train to Auschwitz*

Marion Schreiber, the author, was born in 1942 Drossen, Germany and was an editor for *Der Spiegel*, a German magazine, for sixteen years. *The Twentieth Train: The True Story of the Ambush of the Death Train to Auschwitz* is about the daring attempt in Belgium of three Jews who liberated their comrades from certain gruesome death in Auschwitz and from the events and the conditions of occupied Belgium that led to the raid. Many of the events in the book were

based on surviving eyewitnesses who experienced those horrible events in Nazi occupied Belgium. Robert Maistriau, the only living member of the three raiders, at the time of printing, helped Schreiber by telling his story and leading Schreiber to other fellow survivors. An interesting facet to the writing of the book was that the author is a German retelling the events of the resistance to the German occupiers.

When the Germans occupied Belgium, they implemented their eradication policy of all Jews gradually. It was to register all Jews and force them to wear the Star of David. This first step made it easier to identify who the Jews were and what property they owned that would later be confiscated. The second step was to deport all non-Belgium Jews to the East for “labor camps.” The Germans knew that the Belgium Jews assimilated with the majority Belgium culture and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium through her contacts with Princess Marie-Jose, daughter-in-law of King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy, went to Hitler to secure a promises that no Belgians would be deported and that the non-Belgium Jewish deportees would be treated humanely and that their families would remain intact. The promise was nothing but an empty promise for the final third step was to deport the Belgium Jews to the East. The Germans were using trains to deport the Jews at night. The Nazis told one of the grandest lies in the twentieth century to the deported Jews and the Belgian population at large by saying that the trains were taking the deportees to a labor camp to the East. When rumors began to be bantered about that the true destination was to death camps, many Jews did not believe that “civilized” Germany would murder thousands of people so they did not resist and went on the trains to their death. It is at this point that three young Jewish men, Youra Livchitz, Robert Maistriau, and Jean Franklemon planned and executed a raid on one of the death trains to Auchwitz, the twentieth train.

Youra Livchitz, one of the three Jewish liberators, was described as an “intellectual free spirit he abhorred all forms of compulsion, and didn’t want to be tied down by any one organization or ideology” (Schreiber, 2003, p. 4). For Youra the perfect human being had to be very broadminded and eclectic. Youra’s family was Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. From 1928, Youra lived with his brother Alexandre, a staunch Communist, and his mother, Rachel, in Brussels. Rachel’s family was one of the wealthiest families in Bessarabia, Russia. Rachel was a theosophist. It is the belief that all religions have an element of the truth. One of its objects was to form a universal brotherhood without distinction according to race, sex, creed, ethnicity, religion, etc. In many ways theosophy was the antithesis of the Nazi belief about Jews.

Rachel sent her son, Youra, to Athenee d’Uccle, the then new grammar school founded in 1930. The book described the school and its graduates:

...it was the first mixed grammar school for boys and girls. Religion did not feature on the timetable of this free-spirited institution, to which all the citizens who would later be a thorn in the flesh of the occupying Germans sent their children: socialists, freemasons, Jews. Even Communists were tolerated as teachers... Such a climate of discipline and intellectual openness produced large numbers of spirited and independent-minded young people. This little local institution sacrificed more people than any other grammar school in Brussels in the struggle against the Nazis. Three teachers and fourteen pupils died fighting for the Resistance, and eight of those former pupils of the Athenee d’Uccle were executed by the Germans (Schreiber, 2003, p. 17–18).

After grammar school, Youra attended the Brussels “Free University,” the Universite Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), (Schreiber, 2003, p. 22). Youra helped organized a debating society known as “Cercle Libre-Examen” (Schreiber, 2003, p. 24). The debating society believed in

progress and human rights while at a time communism and fascism flourished and their dictators were human rights violators, were flourishing worldwide. The society influenced ULB more than any other political grouping at the university. It was the debating society that formed Group G. "...one of the most hard-hitting resistance organizations in occupied Belgium..." (Schreiber, 2003).

Jean Franklemon, the second member of the liberating trio, was also enrolled at ULB. Franklemon was a Communist. He believed that Communism would cure all the social ills of the world. Franklemon was not only an intellectual or artist, but a person of action. He joined the Stalin-backed republicans to fight the Nazi-backed Fascist of Franco in the Spanish Civil War. His experiences in Spain prepared him to resist the Germans in Belgium.

Robert Maistriau, the third member of the liberating trio, left his medical studies and worked at Fonofor, a metals company. At about the same time, Robert joined the resistance for he wanted to strike back at the German occupiers. Not only were the Nazis confiscating foodstuff, fabrics and coal, but also the Nazis were rounding up young adult Belgians for forced labor in German factories so that German war production could continue to meet Hitler's war demands. Raiding the death train was just another blow he could serve to the German occupiers. In fact, the motive of many Belgians to save Jews was the same motive as Robert Maistriau, namely, an act of striking back.

In the initial planning stages of the raid Youra had to find people willing go on the raid with him. There were many who were initially willing to go on the raid until their anxiety overcame them. The only ones who would be fellow combatants with Youra were his two schoolmates, Jean Franklemon, and Robert Maistriau. The only thing the three liberators had in common was that all three of them were in the scouts together. "Having grown up with the motto

of performing a good deed every day, they already had the altruism required for the rescue mission” (Schreiber, 2003, p. 212). Youra hoped that another colleague, Richard Altenhoff, would overcome his fears and join them. Richard agreed to meet at the initial rendezvous point with a gun attained from Group G.

When the four met at the appointed time and place, Richard Altenhoff gave Youra the gun and wished the other three good luck and hurriedly leaves. Robert Maistriau described what was going in his mind when he said, “It was a mixture of adventurousness, a desire to help and a wish to harm the Germans. At that moment no one could have held me back. We fully believed in what we were doing” (Schreiber, 2003, p. 221).

The three liberators peddled their bicycles to the place Youra planned. They hid their bicycles along the embankment of the road. The plan included that since Youra had the gun, he positioned himself in front of the train to keep the German guards on the train distracted. While Youra was keeping the Germans busy, Jean and Robert ran to the train cars with their pliers and opened the doors to set the people free. Robert’s position was in the middle part of the train, and Jean’s position was in the rear of the train. Once the Jews were free from the train cars, Jean and Robert planned to hand them 50 franc notes, supplied by the resistance, in which they would use to travel on busses to get back home. Once the notes were handed to the Jewish refugee the three had to run in the darkness in the woods in separate ways so that the Germans could not catch them. They put the plan in motion, where Robert put the hurricane lamp on the tracks so the train would stop. Then they hid along the track waiting to pounce on the train.

The train finally arrived and screeched to a halt. Maistriau sprints to the car:

I held my torch in my left hand, and with my right I had to busy myself with the pliers. I was very excited, and it took far too long until I had cut through the wire that secured the

bolts of the sliding door...Finally Robert was able to push open the heavy door of the cattle truck. Pale, frightened faces stared out at him. 'Sortez, sortez!' he shouted, and then, in an unmistakably<sup>3</sup> French accent, ordered the hesitating prisoners in German, 'Schnell, schnell, flehen Sie!'...There was a lot of pushing and shoving in the truck. Some of the prisoners tried to keep their companions from complying with his orders. 'It's forbidden. The Germans will shoot us all as a punishment,' (Schreiber, 2003, p. 225–226).

When the attack began, the Germans thought they were being attacked by a large group of partisans. The German guards remained in their places, which was in the front and back of the train. It was not long that the Germans figured out that they were not being attacked by a large group and started to move towards the middle of the train. Even though it was dark, the moon was full and they could be seen; Robert and Jean had little time to accomplish their mission. Robert tried to open another train car door, but time ran out for the gunfire was getting closer and closer. Robert then fled into the woods and told those who came with him to lie down and hide in the cover of the woods. There were seven liberated Jewish people with Robert hiding in the woods. The Germans did not bother to search for them so the train left. Once the twentieth transport was gone, Robert gave the former seven prisoners a 50 franc note and told them to disperse into the countryside and when they could use the money to get home on busses.

When Robert was freeing the Jews from the train, Jean was in the rear trying to open a train car door with his pliers. Jean was in a more dangerous spot because some of the German guards were at the rear of the train, which was unexpected by the liberators. As Jean was about to open the door a German aimed his gun at Jean and yelled for him to halt. Jean bolted to the woods and the German sprang after him. At some point the German caught up to Jean and a scuffle

ensued. Jean overpowered the Nazi guard and got away, eventually meeting up with Robert where they left the bikes. Youra was not there.

When the train had stopped Youra fired his gun at the Germans who were in the front of the train. In their initial confusion, they left the light on in their train car, which enabled Youra to see who he was shooting. When their wits came back to them the Germans cut the light off in the transport car. Youra fired his gun once or twice too many times for it gave away his position to the Nazis. Two guards chased after him. One of the guards fell back and the other one kept pace with Youra. Youra decided to take cover behind a thick tree and fired at his pursuer. The guard in response took cover and fired back at Youra. The fleeing liberator could hear in the distance shouting and gunfire that came from the train. Youra eluded his pursuers and decided that it was too dangerous to retrieve his bike. He ended up returning to Brussels by foot.

By this courageous, heroic act the trio of liberators, according to the Belgian historian Maxime Steinberg's book *La Traque des Juifs*, freed seventeen Jews (Schreiber, 2003, p. 230). It was the only death train ever attacked in the history of WWII. According to Schreiber, "One would have had to be young, fearless and filled with sympathy for the plight of the Jews to take part in this life-endangering adventure. An act of heroism in the face of all reason" (Schreiber, 2003, p. 230).

*Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*

David Jonah Goldhagen, at the time of the book's printing, was an Assistant Professor of Government and Social Studies at Harvard University and an Associate of Harvard's Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies (Goldhagen, 1996, back cover flap). The basis of the book is from Goldhagen's doctoral dissertation that was awarded the American Political Science Association's Gabriel A. Almond award in 1994 for the best dissertation in the field of

comparative politics (Goldhagen, 1996, back cover flap). Goldhagen realized that it took more than just the Nazi hierarchy or just the Schutzstaffel, SS for short (German Protective Squadron), to kill six million Jews. The common German had to take part in the orgy of killing Jews during the Nazi era. The book investigated how a 'civilized' twentieth century Western Christian nation could commit such gross mass murders. The book has very clinical, juridical overtones in which the Germans are referred to as "the perpetrators." Goldhagen described how ordinary Germans willingly killed Jews even when they could have easily chosen not to kill. The black and white pictures in the middle of the book bleakly reveal to the reader how gruesome the Germans were to the Jews. At the end of the book is an appendix which discussed his methodology used in exploring what the common German did during the Holocaust.

One of the arguments of defense the perpetrators gave was that they were under orders. The underlying implication was that if an underling refused an order from a superior, such an offense was punishable by death. Goldhagen began the book by discussing the events of Captain Wolfgang Hoffmann (Goldhagen, 1996, p. 3–4). The captain and his men were not SS men but ordinary Germans of Police Battalion 101. They were proud of their genocidal work as doing their duty for the Fatherland (Germany). There was one order the captain received that he chose to disobey because he felt it an affront to the honor of himself and the men he commanded. The offensive order was that the captain and all of his men were to sign a declaration that they would not steal from the Poles. Hoffmann puts his refusal of the order in writing. Captain Hoffmann wrote that such an order was unnecessary because his men were:

...of proper ideological conviction, were fully aware that such activities were punishable offenses...that his men's adherence to German norms of morality and conduct 'derives from their own free will and is not caused by a craving for advantages or fear of

punishment...As an officer I regret, however, that I must set my view against that of the battalion commander and am not able to carry out the order, since I feel injured in my sense of honor. I must decline to sign a general declaration,' (Goldhagen, 1996, p. 3).

What this ordinary, German policemen objected to was not the mass murdering of fathers and mothers, young or old, small children and infants, but that he and his men had to sign an order not to steal. How could murder to the grandest scale rate not be an offense to a policeman? The reason why genocidal acts committed by the perpetrators were not against their sense of honor was because it was their duty to kill Jews. It was their duty to cause the Jew to suffer, to rob them of their goods, and then to kill them. The Jews were demonized for centuries and thus it was ingrained in the German culture. The Jews were described as the killers of Christ and deserved to die. Many Germans expressed the belief that the Jews had to be eradicated for the survival of Germany.

Goldhagen described in the book the atrocities and the mindset of the men of Police Battalion 101. The officers and senior noncommissioned officers (NCO), as well as, the men were given the option not to participate in the direct killing of Jews. If one was to take that option a negative stigma would not be placed on that individual and he would be given other duties to perform. Only one NCO came forward to be exempted from the killing. However, they were proud of their work and they took pictures of their killing actions.

As the Germans retreated towards the end of the war into Germany and victory was only a madman's dream, Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, ordered the Genocide to stop, but individual Germans disobeyed that order. In many of the death marches conducted by the perpetrators in 1945, they were not supervised by officers but by NCOs. Toward the end of the war in Germany, there was much confusion and the assumption was that the individual

unsupervised perpetrators were left to their own devices. They could have chosen to let the prisoners go. Instead, they continued to kill the Jews. When the death marches entered a local German town, none of the local citizenry objected or tried to feed the emaciated walking Jewish skeletons.

The entire book described a population in stark contrast to the rescuer and liberator of Jews. The perpetrators consisted of people who bought into the idea that the Jews were not human beings. They believed in the Nazi racial belief system. In sharp contrast to the perpetrator, the rescuer/liberator was someone who considered the Jews like everyone else except in religion. In fact, for the theosophist liberators in Belgium believed every religion contained some truth. Some rescuers, who were not scripturally naïve, read in the Bible that Jesus was killed by the Romans and not the Jews. For some rescuers and liberators the assistance they rendered to the Jews was their way of resisting the German occupier. For other rescuers and liberators, they were very independent thinkers who could think outside the political box of the majority.

### Final Remarks

The five books were chosen for this paper because they gave a good introductory exposure of the rescuer and liberator of the Jews and what they experienced. The first book is a great resource material. The maps in each chapter gave the reader of where the atrocities happened in that particular country being discussed. Since the WWII generation is rapidly leaving this Earth, the numerous eyewitness accounts that express a living memory is priceless. The listing of the traits of rescuers (see page three of this paper) in the first book was exhibited by all of the rescuers/liberators discussed in this paper. The second book was quoted heavily because the written descriptions conveyed so clearly of what Karski saw and felt. As the writer of this paper and as I read about what Karski had seen in the Warsaw Ghetto and the hideous scenes of the death camp, I too felt Karski's physical uneasiness and disgust over what the Nazis were doing. I chose the third book because it told the story of the Catholic Church's, albeit secretly, involvement in providing aid and comfort to the Jews even to their own peril. Then I chose the fourth book because it gave an example of how three individuals made the decision to make a difference and save their fellow Jewish human beings. Finally, I chose and briefly discussed the last book for the purpose of rendering a sharp descriptive contrast of the perpetrator verses the rescuer/liberator. Sometimes a better understanding of who these rescuers and liberators were is to include what they were not. The effect produced in such a contrast is akin to when one is adjusting the picture on a television set to make the image produced crisp.

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Appendix

Table 1.

*Righteous Among the Nations by Country and Ethnic Origin, January 1991<sup>1</sup>*

The Netherlands	3,372		Denmark <sup>2</sup>	11
Poland	780		Bulgaria	11
France	780		England	10
Germany	251		Switzerland	13
Italy	142		Norway	3
Hungary	160		Albania	3
Czechoslovakia	117		Spain	3
Greece	117		Luxembourg	2
Austria	69		Brazil	1
Yugoslavia	76		Portugal	1
Romania	37		Japan	1
USSR:			Turkey	1
Byelorussia and Ukraine <sup>3</sup>		192	Total	9,295
Lithuania	13			
Estonia	1			
Armenia	1			

Notes

1. These figures represent only the material made available to Yad Vashem and in no way to be construed as reflecting the number of Jews saved for each particular country; for example, more Jews were rescued in Belgium than the Netherlands, yet we have seven times as many persons for the Netherlands as we do for Belgium.
2. As a gesture for the rescue of the Jewish community in that country, the entire Danish nation was recognized.
3. Includes ethnic Ukrainians living in Poland and Lithuania.