A SPECIAL ISSUE ON “JEWS RESCUING JEWS”

Mila Racine and Marianne Cohn
Two Jews Who Rescued Jews in Nazi Europe

Mila Racine was born on September 14, 1919, in Moscow. In 1926, her family immigrated to Paris. Along with her brother Emmanuel and her sister Sacha, Mila enjoyed life in that cosmopolitan city. Her passions were music, languages, and Zionism. As a teen, she formed a new branch of WIZO called Jeune WIZO. When the Germans invaded Paris in June, 1940, the Racine family fled to the “Free Zone,” settling first in Toulouse and later in Luchon. During this time, Mila joined the ultra-secret organization known as the Armée juive (Jewish Army), and participated in activities of the Éclaireurs israélites de France (EIF), the French Jewish Scouts. Through the EIF, she became friends with Marianne Cohn. In 1942, Mila and Sacha prepared and sent emergency food parcels to prisoners starving in the Gurs internment camp.

When the Germans took over much of the south of France, in November, 1942, Mila’s family moved to Nice in the Italian zone. She joined the Mouvement de Jeunesse Sioniste (MJS), one of the Jewish rescue groups helping refugees. In the spring of 1943, the MJS sent Mila to Saint-Gervais, high in the French Alps, where 1,000 refugees were housed. She organized activities for the 200 children. With the danger mounting, the MJS joined forces with other groups to smuggle Jewish children into Switzerland. On August 17, 1943, Mila passed her first group of children across the border in the area near Annemasse. Despite the greatly increased danger after the Nazis invaded the zone in early September, Mila continued to smuggle children across the border.

On the night of October 21, 1943, Mila was arrested with a group at the border. She was imprisoned for three months and then deported...
to Ravensbrück. Several accounts of camp survivors speak of Mila’s courage and fortitude and her efforts to sustain others. In early March, 1945, she was sent to Mauthausen. On the morning of March 20, 1945, she was in a work commando dispatched to Amstetten to damaged clear rail lines. The American Air Force bombed the town that afternoon, killing Mila and 34 other women.

Marianne Cohn was born on September 17, 1922, in Mannheim, Germany. When she was five years old, her family moved to Berlin. Her later childhood was marked by the upheavals occurring in Europe. Threatened by the rise of Nazism, the family moved to Barcelona in 1934. Their relatively peaceful life there ended with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Marianne and her sister were sent away and later rejoined their parents in Paris in 1939. Her parents were soon arrested as enemy aliens and sent to Gurs internment camp, and the Cohn girls were sent to an EIF farm in the south of France. For the next three years, Marianne lived and worked with EIF leaders in their Moissac headquarters, helping to care for refugees and assisting Simon Lévitte in the development of the documentation center.

When Lévitte moved the documentation center to Grenoble in 1943, Marianne followed. She became a member of the Grenoble section of the MJS and helped provide food, accommodations, and medical care to Jewish refugees. After Mila was arrested in October, 1943, the passing of Jewish children into Switzerland was halted for three months. When the convoys resumed, Marianne stepped in to do the work that her friend could no longer do.

Carrying identity papers that listed her name as “Colin” instead of “Cohn,” she smuggled groups of children across the border from January through May. On May 31, she was arrested with a group at the border. Although the mayor of Annemasse, Jean Deffaught, was able to secure the provisional release of the younger children, Marianne and 11 older children were imprisoned in the town. On the night of July 7-8, Marianne was taken from her cell. Her body was found in a shallow grave a few weeks later, after the liberation of Annemasse. All of the children survived the ordeal, thanks largely to the efforts of Deffaught, later honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile.

OSE AND THE RESCUE OF JEWISH CHILDREN IN FRANCE

OSE, was founded in 1912 by a group of Jewish doctors and intellectuals in Russia. Their goal was to improve the social and medical conditions of Jewish families in need. After the Russian Revolution, OSE was expelled and moved to Berlin. In 1933, Hitler came to power and OSE moved to Paris.

In June 1940 the German occupied Paris. Most of the refugee children from the North were evacuated to homes in the south, the Unoccupied Zone.

At the beginning of the war, OSE had succeeded in getting permission from the Vichy government to give medical assistance to refugees in the southern camps, especially Gurs, Agde, and Rivesaltes, where living conditions and sanitation were very bad. But the urgent task was to rescue the children from these camps and place them in OSE homes. OSE workers not only used legal methods to secure releases of the children, but sometimes smuggled them out. By 1942 there were 1200 children sheltered in 14 OSE homes, ten of them in the “Unoccupied Zone” of central and southern France, all largely staffed by Jewish adults.

Before the large deportations of summer 1942, more than 600 Jewish children were liberated from the internment camps in the south. Some children were sent to the U.S., saving them from certain death. American visas, obtained with the help of the American Friends Service Committee, the Quakers, allowed 300 children to emigrate to the U.S. in 1941-1942.

The OSE set up a “clandestine network,” under Georges Garel. Garel was a former French army officer, a member of the French Resistance who now devoted himself to the Jewish resistance and headed the children’s rescue operation. Children received “Aryan” identities and forged papers. Catholic and Protestant church leaders called upon religious organizations which helped to shelter the children and even to provide false baptismal certificates. Some of the boys were hidden in the forest and cared for by the French Jewish Boy Scouts. Girls were hidden in convents. Some children were placed with Christian families.

In 1942, Hitler gave the order for the Final Solution. In November 1942, after the Germans occupied most of Vichy France, OSE intensified its secret activities to protect Jewish children. Jewish administrators and social workers risked their lives to produce false papers and locate hiding places in non-Jewish homes and institutions for thousands of children. Thousands more were successfully sent across the border into neutral Switzerland or Spain.

By the end of the summer of 1943, there were 1600 children in the Garel network, being cared for by non-Jewish French families and institutions. Many of these children had formerly been in OSE homes, which were being shut down because of the raids.

Children who were too young, who "looked Jewish," or who had not mastered fluent French, were smuggled across
the Swiss border by OSE guides. Over 1000 children escaped from France through these convoys. Marianne Cohn, an OSE guide, was caught with her convoy in May 1944 and killed by the Germans. One convoy in March 1944 went by the more difficult route across the Pyrenees into Spain and from there to Palestine.

On February 8, 1944, the central office of OSE in the south was raided, and all the staff members arrested. This ended the existence of OSE as a legal organization, but the clandestine work continued.

The worst German raid occurred at the Izieu home in the Department of Ain. There the Gestapo, under the direction of Klaus Barbie, on April 6, 1944 arrested all 44 children, 7 teachers, and the director, who were deported to their deaths in Auschwitz.

In spite of OSE’s caution, some children and adults were deported. In all, 32 OSE staff members lost their lives, and more than 90 OSE children died. Nevertheless, historians estimate that by the end of the war, OSE had saved between 6,000 and 9,000 of the children in their care.

After the war, OSE continued its work. After the liberation of Buchenwald in 1945, OSE took charge of 427 surviving children and placed them in rehabilitation facilities in France. Among those cared for were Eli Wiesel and the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Israel Lau.

(Adapted with special thanks to Arline R. Thorn)

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**MJS**

Mouvement de Jeunesse Sioniste, France

In May 1942 the MJS movement was created. Some of its members joined the Armee Juive, the Jewish Army, whose goal it was to serve as a Jewish national military army in the fight against Nazism and for the support of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. This organization supported and aided in the spiriting away of Jews across the borders of France, mainly to Spain, in the forging of identity papers etc. for hidden children. The collaboration of the Zionist youth with the “sixth” of the Scouts and the OSE in the illegal border crossings to Switzerland and Spain was the ultimate achievement of this group. In the area of children’s rescue in France it is estimated that more than 7,000 children were saved by the concerted efforts of all the organizations.

**Dr. Ethan Guinat**

France

Born in Vienna, in 1920, Ethan Guinat and his family left in 1935 and settled in Belgium. Five years later when Belgium and Holland were conquered, he fled to France. In France he set up an organization to save Jews from the imminent Nazi danger. Many children, now known by the name ‘Les Enfants Cachés’ or the hidden children, owe their lives to this organization. Known by the name ‘Toto’ during his years in the Resistance, he is now the President of the Veterans of the French Jewish Resistance Organization. Of 300,000 pre-war French Jews more than 200,000 Jews survived the Nazi occupation. This high percentage is the result of the Jewish resistance in France. Dr. Ethan Guinat now lives in Israel.

**Cesia Weinlos**

Poland

Cesia took Maria Orlowski (then Winter, born June 2, 1933), with her to the Aryan side of Ozarov in Poland at the request of Maria’s mother, in the fall of 1941. Cesia was not related to the Winters and was putting her own life at risk as the eight-year old girl had definite Jewish looks. Cesia, who didn’t look Jewish, had false Aryan papers and lived in the non-Jewish world. In the fall of 1941, the Winter family, originally from Lodz, lived in Ozarov with their two children and grandparents. Cesia came to Ozarov to take away her nephew for whom she already had a hiding place. Taking away Maria was not planned, but Cesia complied with the mother’s pleading and took her as well. On a train, she found a Polish woman willing to take Maria. This was Maria Oracz, who was awarded the title of “Righteous Gentile” in 1994. Cesia risked her life in saving Maria Orlowski. All the other members of the Winter family were murdered.

**Vladka Meed**

and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Vladka Meed looked Polish. Early on, she was sent out into the "Aryan" section of Warsaw to aid the resistance by smuggling food and supplies into the ghetto. Only 70,000 Jews remained in the ghetto when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began. Through bribes and deception, Vladka got past the Gestapo and proved to be a vital link in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Now she helped smuggle guns, ammunitions and molotov cocktails into the ghetto. Although the Uprising failed, the valiant actions of Jews like Vladka proved to the Nazis that Jews could fight back. Vladka carried on working against the Nazis after she escaped from the flaming Ghetto. After the Uprising, she helped many Jews find homes in "Aryan" Warsaw, where they could hide from the SS and the Gestapo.
Surviving Children of OSE Honor their Jewish Rescuers
12 November 2000
US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Wash. D. C.
(thank you to Ruth Keller and George Goldbloom for the text)

Jewish rescuers of OSE children being honored by OSE-USA at a ceremony at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington in November 2000. From left to right: Simone Weil-Lipman, Judith Hemmendinger, Margot Cohn, Lili Garel, Georges Loinger, Rachel Pludermacher, and Elisé Cogan.

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Georges Loinger
Georges Loinger taught us that a strong body strengthens the mind and the will to resist. He applied these lessons himself when we all faced deadly danger. As a key member of the Circuit Garel, he courageously risked his life repeatedly to bring hundreds of children to safety – a true hero of the Jewish Resistance.

Lili Garel
Lili Garel was a close collaborator of her late husband in the work of the famous Circuit Garel to whom so many of us owe our survival. The daring and amazing success of these young Jews still astonishes us today and will live forever as an example of Jewish resistance to the Shoah.

Rachel Pludermacher
Rachel Pludermacher was a devoted member of the OSE staff during and after the Shoah. At Chabannes, separated from our parents, like a true mother, she dispensed love and taught us important lessons for life. Courageously, she protected us when the need arose.

Margot Cohn
Margot Cohn was a social worker in OSE homes during the critical period of 1942-1943. She assisted in dispersing children in the Lyon region, thus ensuring their safety, before she joined the Resistance. After the war she resumed her humanitarian work with OSE by helping needy children left without families.

Simone Weil-Lipman
As a young OSE social worker, Simone Weil-Lipman entered the Rivesaltes internment camp to minister to the sick and despairing. She then helped Jewish children through her work in OSE homes and participated in their rescue as part of the Circuit Garel. After the war, she directed OSE homes sheltering children left without families.

Dr. Elise’ Cogan
As a medical doctor, Elise’ Cogan took care of us not only in body but also in mind. As a devoted OSE staff member at Masgelier, he undertook the difficult task of finding food for the children.

Vivette Samuel
“Sauver les Enfants” is not only the title of Vivette Samuel’s book, but the guiding principle of her life. Her humanitarian work in the French internment camps of Rivesaltes and Les Milles was in the best traditions of OSE. Through initiative and persuasion, she obtained the liberation of many children in order to place them in OSE homes. Later, she helped the Circuit Garel to hide them from their enemies.

Jetti Malkin
Jetti Malkin was recruited by OSE in 1942 to set up children’s homes in Vic-sur-Cene, Saint-Raphael (Villa Mariana), and Moutiers-Salins. After the German occupation of the Italian zone, she succeeded in saving all children under her care, either by having them smuggled over the Swiss border or by arranging for their safety in hiding.

Dr. Icchok Malkin
A medical doctor in the OSE tradition, Dr. Icchok Malkin used his professional skill to care for the refugees suffering in the French internment camps at Agde and Rivesaltes. He later applied his skills to heal children in OSE homes at Vic-sur-Cene, Saint-Raphael, and Moutiers-Salino. After serving in the Resistance, he continued his medical work with survivors of concentration camps.

The legend of the Lamed Vav Zaddikim may give us a suitable designation for these heroes. The fate of the world -- at any rate, of the Jewish world rested on them though they were not aware of their special role.
Gerda Bikales
Dear Friends

How I wish that I could give you an insider's view of all the activities of our World Federation!

We are getting much positive feedback on our involvement in the arena of Holocaust remembrance. The article in "Together" magazine, which I wrote with input from Haim Roet and Chana Arnon, Ilana Drukker, et al, in Israel and Rene Lichtman has brought attention to our project, "Jews Rescuing Jews"; honoring Jewish rescuers. The initiative for this as well as for launching "Onto Every Person A Name" was Haim Roet's.

In June I went to Poland to participate in our Child Survivor group's conference. I knew that this trip, though not my first, would be emotionally very difficult (I am from Poland). But I could not have known how rewarding it would be to be among my siblings, to immerse myself in their lives, to see things from their perspective. I was particularly touched to see how caring they are with one another, how they give of themselves, their time.

I was impressed with their actions on behalf of the Righteous, those who helped save Jewish lives. Twice yearly they send them packages, and they buy medicines for them, they help care for them. They raise money for this from their own meager resources. Most famous among these righteous is Irena Sendler, whom I had the opportunity to visit twice (one of the incentives for my trip to Poland) who had worked with Zegota and had saved 2500 children from the Warsaw ghetto. Among these is Bieta Ficowska, my very generous hostess, who is now President of the Polish group.

Renata Zajdman, our WF Liaison to Poland, also among those saved by Zegota, was unable to be with us, but because of her activities on behalf of the group she was missed by all. Elzuni Mundlak, documentary film maker of "Ships of Hope", and now preparing an exhibit at Czestochowa, has become a good friend to our Polish Child Survivors, as is Henrietta Kresz, a frequent and generous visitor from Belgium.

I also went to Radomsko, where I had lived and from where I had been smuggled out of the ghetto. I went there with Basia Frydman-Kostrzewa, also from Radomsko. I wanted to call each of my children and to tell them that I am walking the streets where my parents and grandparents had walked.

I could not have anticipated that a look at the pre-war telephone book for Poland (one not very thick book on Bieta's bookshelf) would shatter me—most of the names in the telephone book were Jewish names, in a country which is now essentially Judenrein.

Getting back to the conference; one of the presentations was by a group of Polish university students who decided to learn about the former Jewish inhabitants of a small village. They put together a skit based on the lives of these Jews of a village that now has not one Jewish inhabitant. They took lessons from one of the older survivors and learned to sing in Yiddish. Many child survivors are involved in that kind of educational effort.

Since my return I have been trying to help my new friends in finding relatives, friends, and in some cases to elicit clues to their very identity; their name, their birthdates.

As in the case of many other survivors in the USA, they have asked me to look into their claims with the Claims Conference. In my position on the Board, I have continued to voice my opinion in favor of most of the funds going to serve the physical and social needs of the survivors whose needs are growing ever more desperate in declining economies.

A visit to the cemetery suggested another project; providing prayers of Kaddish and El Mole Rachamim, with appropriate transliterations, to cemeteries throughout Europe. My suggestion has elicited much interest.

At the Hidden Child/Child Survivor Conference we will be presenting a first; a panel discussion by the “Jews Rescuing Jews Committee”. We will present certificates to a few of those Jewish Rescuers; heroes and heroines of our people. We have been working on this project with our Israeli brothers and sisters of whom I wrote to you before.

Our WF film, "Hidden-Poland", by Rene Lichtman and Allan Siegel, will be shown at the conference.

Throughout this difficult time we have been supportive of our people in Israel; active in Hasbara (community watch and information), and in constant touch with our many friends in Israel and YESH, the association of child survivors in Israel.

We are very appreciative of the work being done by our conference hosts, the Hidden Child/ADL group and most especially grateful to Ann Shore, Carla Lessing (carrying a double load of conference and workshop coordination) Rachelle Goldstein, and Lore Baer.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the conference. I hope we will once again share the warmth of our family atmosphere and enjoy those precious hours together.

With all my love

Stefanie

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**Irena Sendlerowa Wins Jan Karski Award**

**Stefanie**

**WHO IS RACHELA?**

Irena Sendlerowa is the first to say she had Jewish helpers in the Warsaw Ghetto. Some died rescuing Jewish children. In “Conscience and Courage”, Eva Fogelman states that Irena and her Christian and Jewish Zegota network “was successful because these Christians and Jews had known and worked with each other before the Warsaw Ghetto and deportations”. On page 337, in a footnote, Eva Fogelman writes:

“Irena Sendlerowa worked with five Jewish youth leaders who themselves did not want to escape. One of this group, known as Rachela, took children out of the ghetto when she went to work outside the ghetto. One day when she returned at the end of a workday, a Christian friend stopped her and told her that she would be killed if she returned without the children she left with that morning. She ignored the warning and was killed by the nazis that evening”.

**Gerson Reibstein**

A Jewish Rescuer in Dachau

Of his deeds he does not boast
But remains one of us
A “Yaneke Youth” Gershke
Your name, a legend full of hope

More in our next issue…

**Searches-Missing Identities in Poland**

**Bronka Klibanski, Jewish Rescuer in Belarus**

In February 1942, Bronka was asked to stay in the Bialystok ghetto to work for the movement. Bronka was then asked to move to the Aryan side of the city to serve as a liaison officer. Using a forged birth certificate, Bronka applied for a German ID card. A friend helped her find a job as a housemaid for three German railroad operators. Knowing them was a great help when she rode the trains in pursuit of arms to buy and deliver.

While living on the Aryan side, Bronka became a contact for Jewish girls from the Grodno ghetto in flight from the Germans. Although the Bialystok ghetto was being liquidated, Bronka, with her perfect Polish and her non-Jewish appearance, managed to evade arrest. At the start of the Bialystok ghetto uprising, August 16, 1943, Bronka established contact with the partisans. The uprising lasted more than three weeks. Mordechai Tenenbaum was killed and with him died many fighters. Bronka managed to save one of the fighters. At another time she met a man who had escaped from Tereblinka and she brought him to the partisans.

The partisan group grew from 50 to 100. Bronka and her friends brought food, weapons, and medication to the forest, but the need far outstripped the supply they were able to get •
Most transports to Westerbork, the Dutch camp from where the Jews were deported to the East, came in at night. Yehoshua Birnbaum would meet the train in the middle of all the chaos to catch children who arrived without parents. They were housed in barrack #35, where there were four dormitories and a big dining room at the disposal of the children. This was the orphanage for which the Birnbaums took personal responsibility. Special permits and baptism certificates were produced to protect the children. In Bergen-Belsen the Birnbaum orphanage remained in operation until April 23, 1945. Dozens of abandoned children survived Bergen-Belsen through the care and devotion of the Birnbaums and their devoted helper, Mrs. Frederika Melkman-de Pauw. Today they live in Israel.

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Letter: from Warsaw Ghetto to Oregon

It took me 60 years before I managed to tell a part of my story, my experiences during the days of the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto and being smuggled out to be placed in a convent. I was 6 when the war broke out and 8-1/2 when taken to the "Aryan" side.

My manuscript is 26 pages. I have just discovered your organization on the internet and thought you might be interested in having my story.

I certainly know of Irena Sendler whom I don't remember (my direct contact was a Basia), but my father often spoke of her as one of the "sainted" few, and he has written of her in his books.

My parents were very much Jewish in terms of cultural identity and the Yiddish language, but they were among those of their generation who renounced religious observance. In terms of my roots, I am certainly Jewish, though I don't belong to any community that identifies mainly as Jewish. I did live in Israel for many years, and a part of my heart is still there, though again, I am not totally identified with the Jewish country.

I live in Oregon, in a little town near Ashland.

This is a totally new chapter in my life, reclaiming a part that was too painful to deal with in the past -- not only the pain of my experience but the grief over those who did not survive and the whole shattering of my initial reality. I have been healing over the years and it is very gratifying for me to be reclaiming that part of myself that I for so long tried to deny and bury.

Margarita T.
Governing Board Representatives

Please note that the Governing Board is meeting on Monday evening, the 25th, and continuing until the beginning of the conference on Tuesday, August 26th, at the Mayflower hotel in Washington, D.C.

We Mourn Our siblings

Our dear friend Anita Paprota, of New York---a special friend to all who knew her through her many years of child survivor conferences.

Speedy Recovery/ Refuah Schlemo

Eva Abraham Podietz, while with her grandson, broke her hip and arm--still in hospital after surgery.

Stefanie’s granddaughter, Lila Zlotowski, surgery.

Deadline for ICHEIC

The deadline for filing claims for the ICHEIC (Holocaust Era Insurance Claims) has been extended to September 30th, 2003. Check the website www.icheic.org for new names that have been published.

Information on Compensation, Restitution

The Claims Conference does not administer programs listed in sites below. CC information: www.claimscon.org.

German Pensions for work in Ghettos: www.claimscon.org/forms/Ghetto_Pension_Handbook.pdf

The Netherlands: www.sie-sjoa.nl

Slovak Republic: Fax: ++421-2-55421771
Email: Kancerada@stonline.sk
Internet: www.holocaustslovakia.sk

Brussels, Belgium: Tel. 32-2-501-0445
Email: marc.detrazegnies@premier.fed.be
Website: www.premier.fgov.be

Austrian Reconciliation Fund
Tel.: (43-1) 513-6016; Fax: (43-1) 513-6016-15
Email: reconciliationfund@bmaa.gv.at
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