



## Between families: Jews and their rescuers during the Holocaust

Irena Steinfeldt

One of the purposes of Yad Vashem, as defined by the law that established the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, is to commemorate the non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. In the context of this endeavor – which soon will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary – the Righteous Among the Nations Department gathered a great deal of diverse documentation for the use of the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous. The testimonies, photographs and documents in the thousands of files tell the stories of survivors and rescuers. These are stories of heroism and solidarity, of betrayal and denunciation, and of the determined struggle against an indifferent or hostile world. The documents portray the encounter between persecuted Jewish families and those of the rescuers, the ties that were forged between those in hiding and those that hid them and the traumas that have left their mark to this day.

### **“It is better this way than to take you with us to the unknown” – Momentous decisions and farewells**

“I don’t know what I did to deserve the fact that my mother thought about me of all people during those terrible moments,” says Shlomo F. Shenkar in the opening lines of his memoir. He remembers very clearly the terrible chaos and confusion that ensued when the Germans came to arrest his six-member family in their Paris apartment that January morning in 1943, and his mother who shoved him out of the apartment right under the nose of the police:

“She took my hand in hers and led me to the bathroom, which was right next to the front door. The police, who were very nearby to the front door stopped my mother and she asked them to let her go to the bathroom ‘because the boy needs to go.’ The police officers stepped back and I entered the bathroom together with my mother. She picked me up to the toilet seat, put her hand under my chin and lifted it so that our gazes met. Hers was different from normal – her eyes were wild and had lost their soft, good-natured expression; they communicated an absolute imperative – and when she opened her mouth to speak, her voice was choked with tears: ‘Shloimele, my Shloimele,’ she repeated in a choked voice. ‘Run – because if you don’t – you will die,’ adding, ‘You remember the dead bodies on the way from Belgium.’ Then she mumbled a prayer as her hand ripped the yellow Star of David patch from my clothing. [...]”<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to conceive the terror that could cause a mother to thrust her six-and-a-half-year-old son into the street, where there was no one to protect or shelter him. After a few days of wandering the streets, Shlomo turned to Joseph Migneret, the headmaster of the school that he had attended.



The headmaster took the boy to his home and then transferred him to a safe place. In 1990, Yad Vashem awarded Joseph Migneret the title of Righteous Among the Nations. Shlomo's mother, two sisters and two brothers were all murdered.

Shlomo's mother acted at a moment of clear and present danger. The police officers who had burst into the apartment left her no time for thought or deliberation, and she responded intuitively. Other parents had weeks and months to contend with this same terrible dilemma, weighing and considering the situation to see if it justified taking this most difficult of all steps: Should they relinquish their children and hand them over to strangers? Should they, as in the case of Shlomo Shenkar, send them off to an unknown fate, dooming them to fight for their lives all alone in an indifferent or hostile world? Many parents agonized, finding it impossible to make the excruciating decision to part from their children, and the murderers caught up with them before they could do anything; others translated their fears and trepidation into action.

An example of such a heartrending decision can be found in a letter written by Marie Ijzerman in Amsterdam on March, 13, 1943. She gave the letter to the members of the underground who took her baby son, Andy:

My beloved child: I am forced to write you a few words before I leave you, hopefully not forever. But, it so seems, there is little hope that I will ever see you again. My dearest Andy, I must bid you farewell now, when you are only nine months and three weeks old. God knows what a terrible price this is for us, but it is better this way than to take you with us to the unknown. I hope that you will grow into a brave young man and that you will love the people raising you as if they were your parents. And now, my dearest child, only God knows if we are doing the right thing or not. I always wanted you to be with me, but the situation is that it would be too dangerous for you, and I don't want you to fall into the hands of our executioners. And now, my child, I must bid you farewell. A thousand kisses from your mother and father. May God bless you, amen. Marie Ijzerman Trompetter.<sup>2</sup>

Andy's parents turned to NV (Naamlose Vennootschap), an underground Dutch resistance group also known as the "Anonymous Group," which saved more than 200 Jewish children; it transferred them to Christian families, kept an eye on how they were doing and supported the rescuers with documents and ration cards. The members of the group found a place for little Andy to be hidden, and in retrospect, it was that heartbreaking decision that saved the baby's life. The parents' fate was less fortunate: After being denounced, they were arrested in February 1944 and sent to Auschwitz, where they perished. The hope the mother expressed in her letter that her child would find a warm home was not realized immediately – the child was not well treated in the first home in which he was placed. However, after the underground discovered that he was being neglected, they moved him to a better home, that of a 43-year-old widow in the Overijssel district named Hermana van Corbach-De Vries, who hid him until the end of the war.



The agony of separation was shared by the children too. This is how Eva Nisencwaig-Bergstein of Staszow in the Kielce district in Poland describes being separated from her parents:

The summer of 1941 will forever remain the most traumatic and painful time of my life. As the summer was slowly drawing to an end, so was my world [...] When my father, an eternal optimist, finally admitted to himself that the foreshadow of doom is evident, he acted quickly to get us out before the ghetto gates shut on us forever.

He explained that I would have to live with his friends, Stanislaw and Wiktorja Szumielewica.... He promised that he would come for me as soon as things were back to normal. He explained all this as we set out on our journey through the fields outside of Staszow. After several hours of walking hand in hand and mostly in silence, I knew that this was a very significant journey [...] The journey which was to be our last time together was over much too soon as we came upon the Szumielewiczes in the open fields [...] I was five years old, but I knew that I was letting go of my whole life; my family, my world [...] When I felt Wiktorja's warm but unfamiliar hand on mine, I was engulfed in the deepest grief; perhaps I knew I would never see my beloved father's face again....<sup>3</sup>

The Staszow ghetto was sealed in June 1942, and by January 1943, the last of its Jews had been deported to Treblinka, among them all of Eva's family. Of her entire large extended family, only she and one aunt survived.

The dismantling of the family unit is a recurring motif in the rescue stories. The Sessa family lived in Rome and owned a sewing supplies shop. On the day of the roundup in Rome on October 16, 1943, the members of the family fled from their home and began a period of wandering. With the help of a priest, the father managed to find a hiding place for his children in the Christian institution of Convento Cristo Re. An acquaintance who was a doorkeeper for a newspaper arranged a hiding place for the parents with one of the print workers, Alberto Carini. The Carini family placed a room at the disposal of the couple and took care of all their needs. But the younger son Claudio could not bear being separated from his parents, and despite the terrible danger, from time to time, the father would take him into their hiding place for the weekend.<sup>4</sup> The members of the Sessa family were able to and maintain contact between themselves and even occasionally see one another. However, many other families remained separated from their loved ones throughout the entire period of hiding and suffered from a lack of information about the fate and wellbeing of their children, parents and siblings.

**"A pressure cooker" – Relations within the family**



The living conditions under the Nazi occupation severely impaired the family fabric. Parents lost their ability to protect their children; the victims were doomed to complete helplessness, and even those families that managed to go into hiding as a whole unit were completely at the mercy of their rescuers. The harsh physical conditions that prevailed in the hiding places – in pits, cellars and attics – the fugitives' terror and fear of the persecutors, the constant tension experienced by people shut in together for months, and sometimes years on end – all these exacted a very high toll from those that were in hiding. A “pressure cooker” – that is how Nechama Herzhaft described her experience of living in an attic in the train station in Sambor in east Galicia. Wladyslaw Bonkowski, the owner of the train station restaurant, hid a number of families – 16 people in all – for over a year, from June 1943 to August 1944. Throughout that entire period, the train station bustled with travelers; trains – including those taking Jews to the Belzec extermination camp – passed through it, and the paralyzing fear of being caught constantly loomed. The need to keep quiet was extremely difficult, for both the children and parents. The attic contained nothing but straw – there were no toys, no reading materials or anything at all with which they could occupy the children. Nechama recalls that a fifteen-year-old girl hiding together with them had some knitting needles, and she unraveled a garment and taught the five-year-old Nechama to knit. They would knit and unravel, knit and unravel. Nechama recalls that there was a thirteen-year-old boy with them who was unable to sit still and remain quiet as required by the situation, and that his parents had no choice but to tie him up and gag him with a rag. After the war, the family immigrated to Israel. The young man was committed to a mental institution, and after a few years, killed himself.<sup>5</sup>

Roald Hoffmann and his mother Clara hid in another attic, in the village of Univ (or Uniew), Ukraine for 15 months until their liberation in June 1944. The fear of being caught and the need to keep quiet and occupy the young child for long periods of time were surely extremely difficult. Through cracks in the window, Roald achingly watched the other children playing in the street below the school building where he and his mother were hiding. Clara Safran-Hoffmann kept her son busy using her imagination. Roald Hoffman describes what they did in poems that he wrote later, as an adult, how they pictured in their mind's eye every detail of the journey one would need to take in order to travel from Univ to San Francisco – how they would have to walk until they reached the main road, from there by wagon to the train station and so on.<sup>6</sup>

The difficult experiences in the “pressure cooker” sometimes caused a complete breakdown of the family unit. Under the extremely stressful conditions of the hideaway, all the members of the family were completely exposed to one another all the time. There was no place for intimacy or any private space, and the children were witness to their parents' helplessness and absolute dependence on their rescuers. Yehoshua Schechner and his son Gabriel survived the Holocaust by hiding in a pit in the area of Tluste near Ternopol. Yehoshua's diary, *Waiting for Lenek*, which was recently published by Yad Vashem in Hebrew, describes the lives of the 14 people who hid in that cave, and explores the



tension between the father and his adolescent son. Testimony to the extent of the difficulties between them is evident in the fact that soon after the war, father and son parted ways – Joshua Schechner immigrated to the United States and his son, Gabriel, immigrated to Israel. The stressful proximity in the hiding place certainly raised barriers between the father and son, and it took 20 years after they parted from one another for Joshua Schechner to finally come to Israel to meet with Gabriel and his family for the first time.<sup>7</sup>

**“I viewed him as an interloper who had invaded our family’s world” – Between Jews and their rescuers**

Thousands of Jews were hidden in the homes of Christians, and living there, they had to accommodate themselves to the lifestyle and religious practices of their rescuers. In many cases, the differences between the home from which they had come and that of the rescuing family were extreme. Different behavioral patterns, differences in culture, in outlook, religion, social standing, disparities between educated city dwellers and simple country folk that took them in – all these further hindered and complicated the efforts at adaptation. In many cases, the hiding of strangers forced an intimate relationship on people who had nothing in common. The circumstances of the Holocaust often reversed fortunes. Middle- or upper-class Jews suddenly found themselves at the bottom of the ladder, bereft of rights, persecuted and at the mercy of people who in normal times would be at the margins of society. Miriam Drukh’s father had been a grain merchant in Dubno, and her early childhood years had been spent in a warm well-to-do family in which nothing was lacking. She knew country life only from the summers, when her family used to vacation outside the city. In order to save her life, her father sent her to the home of a country priest, Ignatij Grogul. The nine-year-old Miriam, who did not speak Ukrainian, found herself living under conditions to which she was unaccustomed and forced to work from morning to night doing chores on the farm like all the family’s children. The sharp transition is engraved on her memory, and she recalls how she cut her hand the first time she was tasked with harvesting grain, and how she was injured when a cow kicked her in a meadow. It took some time before she became friendly with the family’s children, learned Ukrainian and was able to communicate with those around her.<sup>8</sup>

The rescue stories in the files of the Department of the Righteous at Yad Vashem tell of the encounter between Jewish families or fragments of families and those of the rescuers. Hiding forced a close proximity on both sides, and the Jews were often privy to family crises and intimate situations. In their testimonies, they describe how they could overhear their rescuer beating his wife or getting drunk. Other survivors that were hidden in a cellar reported that they were able to overhear their rescuer having intimate relations with his lover behind a partition.



The difficulties were suffered not only by the Jews in hiding; those hiding them also paid a high price. Beyond the very real dangers posed to the lives of the rescuers, the decision to hide Jews meant that the family would have to give up their family routine for an unknown period of time. Hiding other people meant that the family was taking upon itself an additional financial burden, as well as social, and sometimes also family restrictions. There was a constant danger of denunciation by neighbors, and sometimes even from family members. Fearing that the fact that they were hiding Jews might become known, the family could no longer invite friends to their home, and every knock on the door could mean that the end had come. Moreover, by opening their home to persecuted Jews, the rescuers admitted strangers into their family intimacy for an unknown period.

The decision to hide Jews was not self-evident by any means, and in many cases, there were differences of opinion among members of the rescuing families themselves. Roald Hoffmann's mother related after the war that when they first arrived at the home of the Dyuk family in Univ, Maria Dyuk, the mother, initially objected to their presence. A dispute developed between the couple, forcing the frightened Jews to face the possibility that they might be sent on their way as a result. Maria was certainly aware of their distress and empathized with their suffering, but she was also fearful, and quite rightly so, for her fate and that of her children. Her husband, Mykola, the village teacher, on the other hand, had resolved to hide the Jews notwithstanding the dangers. Fortunately, Mykola managed to convince his wife, and ultimately, Maria became a full partner to the project and ministered to the needs of the Jews hiding in their home.

The decision to hide Jews demanded a long-term commitment on the part of the rescuers, and sometimes, when the danger increased, the benefactors' resolve waned. Miriam Drukh describes how after spending some time in the home of the priest Grogul, she heard her benefactor telling his wife that a relative in town had told him that the Germans had discovered that they were hiding a Jewish girl, and that they were planning to murder the entire family and burn down their home. That same relative, said the priest, had proposed that they suffocate the child. The priest's wife, Varvara, was the one who insisted on keeping the child. It was decided to simulate Miriam's leaving the home for the benefit of the neighbors. She took all her belongings, bid farewell to everyone and set out on a path leading to the forest. There, however, the priest was waiting for her with a wagon, and he brought her back home hidden under a pile of straw. From that time forward, Miriam hid in the house and never again ventured outside. The Grogul family continued to protect Miriam, although in other cases, Jews were forced to leave their place of hiding.

And thus, in addition to their terror of being discovered by the Nazi murderers, in addition to being cut off from their previous lives and not knowing anything of the fate of the rest of their family, the fear that their benefactors might at any moment decide that they were no longer willing to take the risk involved in hiding them hovered constantly in the air. Their helplessness led the hidden Jews to do whatever they could to avoid undermining their rescuers' resolve. Children overcame their



sadness at being separated from their parents, did not complain or say anything about difficulties in adapting. They did whatever they could not to be a burden. Even the youngest children made great efforts to be liked by their rescuers. The abandonment they had experienced bolstered their tendency to suppress their feelings and keep them under wrap – they feared becoming close to people or places, lest they once again be forced to leave them.

We can only imagine the intense nature of the trauma experienced by children who were separated from their families and thrown into completely foreign surroundings. Children of all ages were forced to contend with their longing for their parents, the need to adapt to a new and different and sometimes hostile environment, or to people who out of choice or by nature did not treat those who had been handed over to their care warmly. Even if the survivors did not always give full expression to these experiences, we know of cases in which rescue organizations removed children from homes after it was discovered that they were suffering from neglect or abuse, or because the survivors reported this in their testimonies. Rachel Garfunkel, who was hidden in Krakow, reported that to this day she has a scar from the axe that Marian Gruca wielded against her in a drunken rage. Nevertheless, she requested that Gruca and his wife be recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. In the perspective of time, she says, she realizes that it was his terror of being discovered by the Germans that drove him to drink.<sup>9</sup> In other testimonies, these things are not stated explicitly, but can be read between the lines. It can of course be assumed that there were many more cases of brutality or neglect in reality, since applications are made to the Department of the Righteous at Yad Vashem only by those who ultimately wish to express their gratitude to their rescuers.

However, there are also stories of a very different nature: Many families became very attached to the children, surrounding them with warmth and love, and treating them exactly like their own biological children. Sometimes the rescuers wanted to compensate the hidden children for the suffering they were undergoing and overprotected them to the extent that it caused their own children to be jealous. Esther Witlin was hidden together with her mother in the home of Jan and Magdalena Lukawski in Zolkiew in the Lwow region, while her father and eight-year-old brother were hiding in a nearby forest. Despite the fear of their neighbors and the danger of denouncement, the Polish family continued to care for the four members of the Witlin family throughout the entire period of the German occupation. The Lukawski's daughter wrote to Yad Vashem saying that she recalls that she was angry at her parents for taking her prettiest dress and giving it to Esther Witlin so that she could go around outside without drawing suspicion.<sup>10</sup> Mireille and Andre David from northern France opened their home and hearts to Maryse Inowroclowski, a twelve-year old Jewish girl. The girl's father was a prisoner of war and her mother and grandmother had been arrested in Paris and deported to Auschwitz in January 1943. At first, Maryse stayed with her aunt, but after the concierge denounced her, the aunt handed the child over to a neighbor, who asked her brother and sister-in-law, who were visiting in Paris at the time, to take the child in. Fearing to send her to school,





Mireille and Andre took it upon themselves to home school her. "At first," wrote Mireille, "it was difficult to adapt. My eldest son refused to accept her presence. He did not like the fact that I was teaching her myself, while he had to go to school. It reached a point that his schoolwork was affected for a while, but in time, it all worked out." Her son Serge, who was eight at the time, wrote: "At first, the relationship between us was problematic. I had no empathy whatsoever for her. I was angry at the concern and affection my parents showed her. I considered her an interloper who had invaded the world of my family."<sup>11</sup>

The way rescuers perceived the relationship with the children differed from one family to another. There were those who viewed their taking in of a Jewish child as an opportunity to realize their dream of adopting a child. Others viewed the child as a temporary trust placed in their hands, which they planned from the outset to return after the liberation. Maria Pakker of Almelo, Holland took this notion very seriously. When she received the seven-week-old Abraham Pakter, she began to keep a diary of the baby's progress, so that the child's mother, were she to return, would be able to make up the lost years. In the diary, she described the infant's development and pasted in photographs that she and her husband took of him.<sup>12</sup> Abraham remained with his rescuers until the end of the war, and was ultimately returned to his parents along with the diary, just as his rescuer had planned. This was not of course always the case, and even when the original intent had been to provide shelter for the child until after the danger had passed, in time, the rescuers became very attached to the children placed in their care. Although they had planned to serve only as temporary guardians, their love for the children they were raising and looking after grew over time, and when the family members or Jewish organizations came to take the children back, the rescuers balked and refused to return them.

**"From a loving Catholic Flemish home, I arrived at an unfamiliar, French-speaking Jewish orphanage" – After the war**

Bidding farewell to their adoptive families after the war exacted a very high price not only from the children, but also from the rescuers who had cared for them for months and years. The words "It broke my rescuers' heart" recur again and again in the testimonies. In many cases, the ties between the benefactors and those whom they saved developed into a profoundly close relationship, with the shared experience during the Holocaust period fusing the families into a single unit. In the pictures, we can see rescuers and survivors visiting each other and celebrating together on family occasions. Eva Nisencwaig-Bergstein of Staszow, who was hidden by Stanislaw and Wiktoria Szumielewicz, remained in touch with her rescuers even after her relatives took her into their home in Canada. Wiktoria Szumielewicz came to help her – in place of the mother that had been murdered – when she gave birth to her first child, and continued to visit the family regularly until the day she died. Eva's granddaughter is named after Wiktoria, the woman who saved Eva.





And there were also cases in which rescuers and survivors cut off all ties because one side or the other could not bear to have to once again experience the excruciating pain of separation. In certain cases, there were disputes, including legal ones, related to the continued custody of children. Some rescuers refused to return the children, believing with all their hearts that the parents, due to the traumas that they had experienced, would be unable to give the children a warm home or raise them properly, were they to return. When no family members survived, and the child remained all alone in the world, the rescuers could not understand why the child should be raised in an orphanage at a time when they themselves could offer him a loving family. The children were helpless witnesses to these disputes between the rescuers and biological families or Jewish organizations.

This was the situation of Andy Ijzerman, whose mother had left a letter for him when she took him to the Dutch underground. His parents perished, but an uncle, the mother's brother, survived and began to look for any surviving members of his large extended family. After he found his own young son in the home of the family that had hidden him, he started to look for his young nephew, until finding him in the home of Hermana van Corbach-De Vries. At first, she refused to hand the boy over. The negotiations continued for an entire year, until she finally agreed to return the boy to his family. Andy was once again torn from his environment, from the woman who had cared for and loved him, and was transferred to the care of relatives who were complete strangers to him. Ties with his rescuer were kept up even after Andy and his family left Holland and immigrated to the United States, but the scars that the experiences of his childhood left remained with him throughout his entire life, up until his untimely death at the age of 36.

Bernard Tuch of Antwerp, Belgium bounced from one home to another. In 1942, when he was approximately three years old, he was brought to the home of the Willems family. However, his parents, who apparently could not bear to be parted from him, soon sent a cousin to bring him back home. When the girl arrived with the child at the parents' home, the neighbors told her that the parents had been taken. After spending the night with relatives, the cousin brought him back to the Willems family. Sadly, Bernard's hopes of being reunited with his parents were not to be fulfilled, and he remained in the home of his rescuers until the war ended. After the liberation, it was learned that the parents had perished, and when his uncle came to take him back, Bernard did not want to leave the home of his rescuers. The uncle insisted and turned to the courts, which ordered the family to restore the child to his relatives. The members of the Willems family wanted to visit him, but, Tuch maintains, the uncle drove them out of his house, and he recalls how his uncle slammed the door in the face of his rescuers. Perhaps he believed that the child's welfare required that all contact with them be cut off; perhaps he was still angry with the rescuers because of the legal battle. However, this did not spell the end of Tuch's trials. After a short time and for a reason that remains unclear, the uncle decided not to continue to keep the child, and handed him over to an orphanage. In his testimony, Tuch laconically describes the acute and painful transition: "From a loving Catholic



Flemish home, I arrived at an unfamiliar, French-speaking Jewish orphanage.” After a few years, the children of the orphanage immigrated to Israel and were taken to the Nitzanim youth village, and from there to Alonei Yitzhak. After experiencing great difficulties adapting, his uncle finally returned him to Belgium at the age of 13, where he lives to this day.<sup>13</sup>

Children found it extremely difficult to return to the Jewish world and families, the memory of whom they had in many cases tried to suppress while in hiding. After liberation frameworks that had meanwhile been created were once again shattered, and the children again experienced separation and abandonment, this time from the people who had saved them. Sometimes, they still had a faint memory of their original family, which was overshadowed by what they viewed as being abandoned, and in other cases, parents or relatives suddenly reappeared in the child’s world as complete strangers. The upheaval was terrible – for a second time, children were forcibly cut off from the life and family to which they had worked so hard to become accustomed. Their original family was in a fragile state; the challenge of rebuilding a new life was enormous, and the parents, who had returned from the war bruised and penniless after experiencing the terrible traumas of the Holocaust, themselves needed to be rehabilitated. In contrast, the rescuing family could provide warmth, love and stability. The children often ran away to return to the homes of their rescuers, because they viewed them as their real family. These strong ties with the rescuers increased the tensions between the families. The parents feared that the rescuers posed a threat to the fabric of their own family and were envious of the people who had had the fortune to raise their child instead of themselves. These feelings intermingled with gratitude and immeasurable debt towards those who had risked their lives to save their children, resulting in a sense of guilt about their ambivalence towards the rescuers. In the period immediately following the war, when the universal wisdom was that it was best to leave the past behind and forget the traumas, many believed that cutting off ties with the rescuers was the best solution for the children. Decades later, and only after the survivors revisited their past, did they once again seek out contact with their rescuers, and many of them are turning only now to the Department of the Righteous at Yad Vashem with requests to recognize their rescuers.

But even those families that managed to stay together and were not separated from one another during the Holocaust continue to bear scars. Nechama Herzhaft, who had been hidden together with her family in the train station of Sambor, related that after the war, they did not talk about the Holocaust period in her home. She recalls an oppressive silence, and she went back to deal with her past only just a few years ago: “When we grow old, we want to find closure, and this was an open issue.” Her sister Yosefa, who was born after the war, is still angry with her parents to this day because they did not speak, and because of the difficult childhood she experienced within that oppressive silence. The age difference of ten years between the two sisters opened an enormous abyss between them. For better or worse, both parents and the older sister shared the binding



experience of hiding during the Holocaust, while the younger sister, who was born on another continent, in a different reality and with a different identity, had no part in it. Nechama says that she wants to help her sister make peace with the family experience. "With our parents, it's too late, but I want her to be able to live in peace with herself." The sisters went on a tour of Poland and visited Sambor and the railway station together, and today, more than sixty years after the Holocaust, are trying to find the connection.

---

The memory of the rescue – the most noble expression of sacrifice and solidarity as well as the terrible suffering it involved – continues to mark the families and create strong bonds, whether voluntary or not, between survivors and rescuers. Thus, the memory of the little girl that they tried to save remained with Jacob and Wintje de Vries even after their deaths. In the summer of 1942, when the deportations from Holland to the east began, the carpenter and his wife agreed to take four-year-old Loesje Pinto into their home. The little girl soon became a member of their family. Out of empathy with the suffering that Loesje's parents, Izek and Rozalia Pinto, were forced to endure when they were compelled to hand her over to strangers, Jacob traveled to Amsterdam and sought out the place where the parents were hiding in order to assure them that their daughter was in good hands. Perhaps, although we will never know for sure, the knowledge that their daughter had found a loving home made it somehow easier for Izek and Rozalia when they were ultimately arrested and deported to the Sobibor extermination camp in the summer of 1943. However, in that same year, Jacob de Vries was arrested for his underground activities, and at the time when his wife was visiting him in jail, police officers broke into the family's home and found the young Jewish child. Loesje, who was not yet six, spent the last few weeks of her life all alone, without any relatives or acquaintances to comfort her, and in February 1944, was deported to Auschwitz, where she was murdered. The de Vries couple never got over the loss, and in their last will and testament requested that young Loesje be commemorated on the headstone of their family grave. In this way, Wintje and Jacob de Vries commemorated not only to Louise Pinto, the child murdered by the Nazis, who never received a proper burial or gravestone of her own, but also to their own commitment towards her and the deep ties of love between them.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Shlomo F. Shenkar's memoirs, **Nachtom Hazikaron** [Heb.], 2004, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> File of Van Corbach-de Vries, M.31/11615 - Department of the Righteous at Yad Vashem.

<sup>3</sup> File of Wiktoria and Stanislaw Szumielewicz, M.31/1998.

<sup>4</sup> File of Aberto and Maria Carini, M.31/11630.



<sup>5</sup> File of Wladyslaw Bonkowski, M.31/287.

<sup>6</sup> File of Maria and Mykola Dyuk, M.31/ 11169.

<sup>7</sup> Yehoshua Schechner, **Waiting for Lenek**, Jerusalem 2009; File of Linkiewicz M.31/11362.

<sup>8</sup> File of Ignatij and Varvara Grogul, M.31/5567.

<sup>9</sup> File of Marian and Maria Gruca, M.31/5567

<sup>10</sup> File of Magdalena and Jan Lukawski, M.31/11407.

<sup>11</sup> File of Mireille and Andre David, M.31/10315.

<sup>12</sup> File of Maria and Frans Pakker, M.31/11502

<sup>13</sup> File of Stephanie and Franciscus Willems, M.31/11367

<sup>14</sup> File of Wintje and Jacob de Vries, M.31/9694