



## Memories of Menachem Mayer and Frederick Raymes about Righteous Among the Nations, operators of an orphanage in France

**Menachem:** We already mentioned that various organizations were active in the Gurs camp. Among them was OSE, a Jewish association for saving children,<sup>12</sup> whose chief purpose at this time was to protect and save Jewish children. Their rescue program was carried out with the assistance of other organizations, so our transfer from Gurs was undertaken with the help of the Quaker organization, the American Friends Service Committee.

Andree Salomon was the OSE representative. She found places for forty-eight children: we were taken to an orphanage-Maison des Pupilles de la Nation-an institution in Aspet, in southern France, not far from the town of St.-Gaudens. The orphanage was one of several that had been established by the French government after the First World War (in which 1.4 million Frenchmen lost their lives) for children whose widowed mothers were no longer able to take care of them. Now, twenty years later, these orphanages were relatively empty.

**Fred:** Until recently my knowledge of the events leading up to our departure was incomplete, but during one of our conversations, Menachem told me about the letter he received from a Quaker activist, Ms. Alice Resch. Here is what she writes about the events prior to our leaving Gurs:

Ms. Helga Holbeck, head of the delegation of American Friends, heard about the arrival of the German deportees to Gurs. Madeline Barot who headed CIMADE, the Protestant welfare association, had, unbeknownst to the authorities, already spent some months in the camp. Helga Holbeck asked Madeline how the Quakers could help. They visited Gurs and decided to distribute food supplements. Ms. Holbeck immediately grasped the children's plight. Upon her return to Toulouse she contacted Andree, together with the Pau district governor and the camp authorities.... Helga worked with the governor in Toulouse.

It took some time for this administrative activity to bear fruit. Persuading the parents also took time. We were finally able to convince them that the children would be better off outside the camp, where they would receive food and perhaps attend school.. .. We also hoped the parents would be able to visit their children....

Andrée Salomon and a couple named Cohen accompanied the children in the truck, first to Oloron, then by train to St.-Gaudens and again by truck to Aspet. There Andrée took her leave of us, after giving the necessary documents to Mr. Couvot, director of the orphanage. Mr. Couvot, who knew not a word of German, was left with forty-eight children who knew not a word of French. Panicstricken, he immediately phoned the Quaker office in Toulouse: "Help! Send someone who speaks German." Helga asked me whether I would travel to Aspet, and off



I went, with my stomach in a knot! It was one thing to distribute food and clothing, but taking care of forty-eight strange children was something else altogether. ...

Alice Resch was then a young woman in her early thirties. At the time of writing, she lives in her birthplace, Denmark, at the ripe old age of ninety-four.

**Menachem:** In January 1983, the title of Righteous among the Nations was awarded to Helga Holbeck and Alice Resch, in recognition of their efforts in France during the Holocaust. We, the children of Gurs-Aspet, nominated them.

**Source: Mayer Menachem and Raymes Frederick, *Are The Trees in Bloom Over There?* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002), pp. 79-82.**