Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’
Remembrance Day 2020

Rescue by Jews during the Holocaust
Solidarity in a Disintegrating World

“UNTTO EVERY PERSON THERE IS A NAME”

Aron Mengezer (center) on deck with a group of Jewish youth from Vienna, whom he rescued and brought to Eretz Israel, February 1939

Ghetto Fighters’ House Photo Archive
THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem, March 2020
Adar 5780

Dear friends in Jewish communities around the world,

On Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, which we will mark this year on April 21st, we remember the six million of our brothers and sisters whose lives were taken from them during the Holocaust. These were not six million nameless victims, they were men, women and children, each of them a whole world that was destroyed. When we, in Israel and in hundreds of Jewish communities around the world, hold the ceremony known as “Unto Every Person There is a Name”, we read out names of those men, women and children, remembering them and in some way restoring their identities that were stolen from them, helping to preserve their human face, their place in our shared Jewish destiny.

This year, of course, in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic, we shall have to observe this ceremony a little differently, without large gatherings. However, even as we read out the names separately, we can continue to remember – together.

This year, we also want to commemorate the many individual Jews who devoted courageous and untiring efforts to rescue other Jews, groups and communities. They risked their own lives in operations to rescue children and smuggle them to safety in neutral countries, to help families cross borders or hide, to create for them false papers, or to take action to prevent deportations. Sadly, although many were saved by these brave individuals, not all their efforts led to success. However, the heroism and devotion of those heroes, such as Gisi Fleischmann from Bratislava, Zerach Warhaftig in Lithuania, Hennie and Yehoshua Birnbaum in the Netherlands, to name but a few, all have a place of honour in our shared history.

I call upon you to join with me and my fellow citizens of the State of Israel, and with members of world-wide Jewish communities, in carrying out the ceremony known as “Unto Every Person There is a Name” on Yom Hashoah this year in your homes.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Reuven (Ruvi) Rivlin
“Unto Every Person There Is A Name”
Public Recitation of Names of Holocaust Victims in Israel and Abroad
on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day

“Unto every person there is a name, given to him by God and by his parents”, wrote the Israeli poetess Zelda. Every single victim of the Holocaust had a name. The vast number of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust – some six million men, women and children - is beyond human comprehension. We are therefore liable to lose sight of the fact that each life that was brutally ended belonged to an individual, a human being endowed with feelings, thoughts, ideas and dreams whose entire world was destroyed, and whose future was erased. The annual recitation of names of victims on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day is one way of posthumously restoring the victims’ names, of commemorating them as individuals. We seek in this manner to honor the memory of the victims, to grapple with the enormity of the murder, and to combat Holocaust denial and distortion.

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the global Shoah memorial initiative “Unto Every Person There Is A Name”, held annually under the auspices of the President of the State of Israel. The project aims to reach out to as many communities and institutions as possible, in Israel and elsewhere. Significantly, this unique context will continue this year as well, despite the adverse circumstances worldwide due to the coronavirus crisis. With this in mind, we are sending you the attached materials, in the hope that you will join us in this essential mission, and hold an online name-reading recitation on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day.

The theme of this year’s observances is:
Rescue by Jews during the Holocaust:
Solidarity in a Disintegrating World

The Holocaust challenged established social norms, values and relationships. In a reality in which each individual Jew was subject to persecution and the threat of destruction, the instinctive drive for physical survival became dominant. However, even in such conditions, many Jews risked their lives to save other Jews – family members as well as complete strangers.

Jews conducted rescue initiatives on their own, or as part of underground movements and various Jewish institutions. These rescue operations took place in those countries where the Jews were persecuted, as well as in countries to which they fled. Diverse rescue attempts included clandestine crossing of borders, preparation and circulation of forged documents, helping Jews emigrate or hide, and establishing aid and welfare institutions for the benefit of persecuted Jews.
The attached materials include texts and readings on this year’s theme that can be incorporated into your online recitation.

To date more than 4,800,000 names of Holocaust victims have been recorded in Yad Vashem’s online Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, with over 2,750,000 names registered on Pages of Testimony.

You can assist in our ongoing names collection campaign by downloading and distributing Pages of Testimony, or by submitting them online through our website: www.yadvashem.org.

Sadly, the generation of Shoah survivors is dwindling rapidly. As the bearers of their legacy, we must do everything possible to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust’s victims. By reciting their names, ages and places of death, we keep their memory alive, and remind ourselves that each man, woman and child was, and is, an entire world.

Sincerely,

Avner Shalev  
Chairman  
Yad Vashem Directorate
Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day
21 April 2020 – 27 Nissan 5780

Letter from the International Committee
“Unto Every Person There Is A Name”

Introduction
The worldwide Holocaust memorial project “Unto Every Person There is a Name”, now in its 31st consecutive year, is a unique project designed to perpetuate the memory of the Six Million - among them one-and-a-half million Jewish children – murdered while the world remained silent. The project offers the opportunity to memorialize them not only as a collective, but as individuals – one at a time - through the recitation of their names on Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day. You can help to restore the identity and dignity of the victims of the Holocaust by organizing a name-recitation on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day. Links to lists of names taken from Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, and planning recommendations are included below.

The Unto Every Person There Is A Name project focuses attention on the urgent need to retrieve additional names of Holocaust victims, before they recede into oblivion.

The “Unto Every Person There Is A Name” project is conducted around the world through the efforts of four major Jewish organizations: B’nai B’rith International, Nativ, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization.

The project is coordinated by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, in consultation with the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and enjoys the official auspices of President of the State of Israel, the Hon. Reuven Rivlin.

#RememberingFromHome #ShoahNames:
New Yad Vashem Online Initiative: Name-Reading for Holocaust Remembrance Day 2020

Yad Vashem invites the public to participate in an international online initiative to recite, record and share the names of Holocaust victims. Participants should video themselves reciting names (up to 15 seconds) and then share the video in their social media with the hashtags: #RememberingFromHome #ShoahNames.

Lists of names of Holocaust victims will be accessible on Yad Vashem’s website or participants may choose to remember a family member or friend. Yad Vashem will then use some of these videos to create an online Holocaust Remembrance Day Global Name Reading Ceremony.

During these challenging times, join us and mark Holocaust Remembrance Day from your homes. Help us to restore the memory of those murdered during the Holocaust.

To access names for recitation: www.yadvashem.org
**Personalizing the Holocaust**

The most fundamental feature of the Shoah is the systematic murder of six million innocent Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators for the sole reason that they were Jewish. Each of their deaths was a separate, distinct tragedy that together has caused indelible lasting trauma to the Jewish people. As time passes and fewer witnesses remain, it is imperative to create a personal link between the Jewish people today and those who perished under the Nazi genocidal regime. Recitation of names of Holocaust victims - together with such information as their age, place of birth and place of murder - personalizes the tragedy of the Holocaust. Emphasis is thus put on the millions of individuals - men, women and children - who were lost to the Jewish people, and not solely on the cold intangibility embodied in the term “The Six Million”.

“Unto Every Person There is a Name” rests on the success of Yad Vashem’s Shoah Victims’ Names Recovery Project that to date has identified more than 4.8 million names of Shoah victims and that continues its quest to recover all the six million names.

**The Central Theme for Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 2020:**

**Rescue by Jews during the Holocaust - Solidarity in a Disintegrating World**

In a reality where every Jew was in danger, it was natural for individuals to focus on trying to save themselves, their families and their friends. Even though the Jewish people had internalized the generations-old principle that “all Jews are responsible for one another,” choosing to risk one’s life for others cannot be taken for granted. Jews who attempted to save other Jews took a double risk, since they, too, were persecuted under Nazi Germany’s murderous policy. They often unconditionally saved fellow Jews whom they did not even know, and for nothing tangible in return. The prime motivations for their activity were their accurate perception of reality, their awareness of the fate awaiting all Jews, and their profound commitment to Jewish solidarity.

Individuals conducted rescue initiatives on their own, or as part of underground movements and various Jewish institutions. Rescue operations took place both in those countries where the Jews were persecuted, as well as in countries to which they fled. Diverse rescue attempts included clandestinely crossing borders, preparing and circulating false papers, helping Jews emigrate or hide, and establishing aid and welfare institutions for the benefit of all persecuted Jews.

Not every rescue attempt was effective, however, and even though Jews made numerous attempts to rescue other Jews, to do so successfully was almost impossible under Nazi Germany’s systematic murderous policy. The vast majority of the Jews who lived under Nazi German occupation were murdered in the Holocaust.

Numerous other rescue actions by Jews were not documented or preserved due to their clandestine nature, or because their participants were murdered.

The Jewish rescuers faced frequent hardships and dilemmas, yet they chose to act on behalf of their fellow Jews. It is incumbent upon the Jewish people, and the world, to remember and learn from these amazing deeds.

Scroll down to see the complete rationale and a collection of texts and readings for your use.

In addition to this collection of texts and readings, Yad Vashem has created several Ready2Print exhibitions on a range of subjects that can be printed locally.

For more information about the different exhibitions available, [click here](mailto:traveling.exhibitions@yadvashem.org.il)

For any queries, and to receive the exhibition files free of charge, please contact:

[traveling.exhibitions@yadvashem.org.il](mailto:traveling.exhibitions@yadvashem.org.il)

**Recover Names of Shoah Victims**

“Unto Every Person There is a Name” events provide a unique opportunity to gather heretofore unknown names of all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Since its inception, one of Yad Vashem’s central missions has been the recovery of the names and personal stories of all victims of the Shoah. While the Nazis sought not only to physically destroy the Jews but also
to obliterate any memory of them, The Shoah Victims’ Names Recovery Project realizes our moral imperative to memorialize each victim as a human being, and not merely a single collective number. (To learn more about the project click here)

The relentless endeavor has to date identified more than four million eight hundred thousand names of Shoah victims, documented in the Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names online at: www.yadvashem.org with over 2,750,000 names registered on “Pages of Testimony” submitted by relatives and others who knew of the victims. The remainder of the victims’ names in the database were derived from various archival sources and postwar commemoration projects. The outstanding universal value of the Pages of Testimony Memorial Collection has been recognized by UNESCO, which in 2013 inscribed it in its prestigious Memory of the World Register.

The Names Database, uploaded to the Internet in 2004, marked a pioneering use of technology in the service of memory, documenting and commemorating nearly three million names of Holocaust victims. To continue to meet the needs of an expanding worldwide community of users, Yad Vashem has upgraded and re-designed the database, making use of an innovative platform that allows the accessibility of online information in a fast and user-friendly format.

Names recitations may be utilized to call upon members of your community to complete a “Page of Testimony” for each unregistered victim, or to volunteer to assist others with this urgent task.

Important links

> Poem "Unto Every Person There Is A Name" by Israeli poet Zelda (Click here for text of poem)
> Lists of names
> Pages of Testimony

The official opening ceremony at Yad Vashem marking the commencement of Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 2020 will be filmed in advance without an audience, and broadcast on Monday, 20 April at 20:00 (8 PM) Israel time. The ceremony will be broadcast on Israel’s television and radio channels accessible via the internet, and in six languages on Yad Vashem’s website and youtube channels.
We are available to answer any questions that might arise and provide additional material as necessary.

Sincerely,

Members of the “Unto Every Person There Is A Name” International Committee: Inbal Kvity Ben Dov, Dr. Alexander Avram (Yad Vashem); Alan Schneider (B’nai B’rith International); World Jewish Congress; Naftaly Levy (World Zionist Organization); Mr. Ran Yaakobi (Israel Foreign Ministry); Masha Novikov (Nativ).

Project Initiator: Haim Roet

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**RESCUE BY JEWS DURING THE HOLOCAUST**

**SOLIDARITY IN A DISINTEGRATING WORLD**

The Annual Theme for Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 2020

“Fate has willed us apart... Yet that same fate has also willed that during the years of our people's greatest misery, your mother is fulfilling a mission in order to ease this terrible suffering. If I survive this difficult period, I think I will be able to say that I have not lived in vain. In this spirit you must bear this separation, since the shared destiny of the Jewish people stands above any personal pain.”

From a letter by Gisi Fleischmann to her daughter Aliza in Eretz Israel, 6 September 1942 *

Gisi Fleischmann, from Bratislava, Slovakia, was in her forties during the Holocaust. Her two daughters had immigrated to Eretz Israel before the war. For years, she had been involved in public service in the fields of welfare, education, youth hachshara and Jewish emigration, and was active in the Women's International Zionist Organization and the Joint Distribution Committee.

At the beginning of 1942, when Fleischmann and her colleagues learned about the plan to deport the Jews of Slovakia, Jewish figures in Bratislava formed an underground organization that came to be known as “the Working Group.” Thanks to Fleischmann's organizational skills and her contacts with various officials in the Slovak administration, she was chosen by her peers to lead the Group, along with Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel. She was the only woman in a group of men. In the spring of 1942, she and her comrades took action to stop the deportations of Jews from Slovakia to Poland. Besides her involvement in aid and rescue operations, Fleischmann also labored to alert the free world to halt the deportation of Jews from Slovakia to Poland.

Along with the members of the Working Group, Fleischmann was one of many Jews who risked their lives in order to save fellow Jews living under the Nazi regime, which aimed and acted to annihilate world Jewry as part of the “Final Solution.” Germany was aided by collaborators from the occupied nations who played an active role in the persecution, and sometimes even murder, of the Jews. In a reality where every Jew was in danger, it was natural for individuals to focus on trying to save themselves, their families and their friends. Even though the Jewish people had internalized the generations-old principle that “all Jews are responsible for one another,” choosing to risk one’s life for others cannot be taken for granted. Jews who attempted to save other Jews took a double risk, since they, too, were persecuted under Nazi Germany's murderous policy. They often unconditionally saved fellow Jews whom they did not even know, and for nothing tangible in return. The prime motivations for their activity were their accurate perception of reality, their awareness of the fate awaiting all Jews, and their profound commitment to Jewish solidarity.

Individuals conducted rescue initiatives on their own, or as part of underground movements and various Jewish institutions. Rescue operations took place both in those countries where the Jews were persecuted, as well as in countries to which they fled. Diverse rescue attempts included clandestinely crossing borders, preparing and circulating false papers, helping Jews emigrate or hide, and establishing aid and welfare institutions for the benefit of all persecuted Jews. In France, the OSE (Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants, Children’s Aid Society) relocated Jewish children as well as adults from internment camps and sent them into hiding in children’s institutions and private homes. Various organizations and frameworks in which young people participated, such as Zionist youth groups and the Scouts, helped hide children and lead them across the border to Switzerland and Spain. After Nazi Germany occupied Hungary in 1944, local Jewish youth groups smuggled across the border to Romania, fabricated lifesaving false papers and helped children in orphanages that they founded throughout Budapest. Zerach Warhaftig worked to save yeshiva students in Lithuania, while Hennie and Yehoshua Birnbaum worked to save Jewish orphans in the Netherlands — first in the Westerbork transit camp and later in Bergen-Belsen, to where they were deported. In Romania, the Jewish leadership under Dr. Wilhelm Filderman acted to aid Jews who had been deported to Transnistria, sending food and even ransoming some of the people. Jewish organizations operating out of neutral Switzerland also took action to smuggle Jews into the country. When he fled to the woods, Tuvia Bielski decided to form a partisan unit composed of families, including children, women and old people. The vision and mission of the group he founded was that saving lives outweighed all other considerations. Better to save a single Jew, he said, than to kill twenty Germans.

These examples are only a small part of Jewish attempts to aid and rescue other Jews, but they indicate the extent and scope of rescue efforts. Not every rescue attempt was effective, however, and even though Jews made numerous attempts to rescue other Jews, to do so successfully was almost impossible under Nazi Germany’s systematic murderous policy. The vast majority of the Jews who lived under Nazi German occupation were murdered in the Holocaust. Shmuel Oswald Rufeisen sent information to the Jewish residents of the Mir ghetto in Belarus and helped them flee to the woods, but only a few of the Jews who escaped the ghetto survived. Numerous other rescue actions by Jews were not documented or preserved due to their clandestine nature, or because their participants were murdered.

Many of the Jewish rescue initiatives owe a great debt to help extended by non-Jews, including those later recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. The courage of individuals and groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish, during the Holocaust shows that solidarity was maintained in a time of existential danger, and humane and moral values were adhered to, including the will and the obligation to help one’s fellow human being. The Jewish rescuers faced frequent hardships and dilemmas, yet they chose to act on behalf of their fellow Jews. It is incumbent upon the Jewish people, and the world, to remember and learn from these amazing deeds.
Fate has willed us apart... Yet the same fate has also willed that during the years of our people's greatest misery, your mother is fulfilling a great mission in order to ease this terrible suffering. If I survive this difficult period, I think I will be able to say that I have not lived in vain. In this spirit you must bear this separation. The suffering of the People of Israel stands above any personal pain.

Gisi Fleischmann, in a letter to her daughter Aliza (Lizi), in Eretz Israel

Gisi Fleischmann, née Fischer, was in her forties during the Holocaust, the mother of two daughters, Aliza and Yehudit, who made Aliyah and immigrated to Eretz Israel before the war. Fleischmann was active in public affairs, particularly in the fields of welfare and Jewish emigration. She founded the first branch of WIZO in Slovakia, was a member of that organization's board of directors, and a representative on the executive committee of the Histadrut in Slovakia. She was also one of the Zionist representatives on the Joint Distribution Committee, and active in HICEM (the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society).

When the Jewish Center (Ústredna Židov or ÚŽ) was created in Bratislava, Fleischmann was placed in charge of the emigration department. Her office, not far removed from the main office of the organization, became the meeting place for those who were not satisfied with the way the Jewish Center was being run. Fleischmann's special personality, her easy manners, organizational skills and the solidarity she evinced with the members of the community made her the leader of the group, the only woman in a group of men. Together with Rabbi Weissmandel, who was also related to her, and the other members of the group, she worked to save Jews in Slovakia, smuggling them into Hungary and spreading information about their destruction in Poland.

Fleischmann was one of the head negotiators with the Germans in the attempt made by the Working Group to bargain for the Jews' lives. As part of her duties she met several times in Hungary with Jewish leaders, and also attempted to enlist support from the Switzerland representatives of the Joint Distribution Committee and Hechalutz movements in order to raise money to bribe the Nazis.

Time and time again Fleischmann refused to save herself. On 15 October 1944, Fleischmann was arrested and deported to the Sered camp. On 17 October she was deported to Auschwitz under the category of ‘RU’ – Rückkehr Unerwünscht, or ‘return not desired’. This was the last deportation from Slovakia to the gas chambers. When the deportation train arrived in Auschwitz, three names were called out over the public address system – one of them was Fleischmann's. She was taken by two SS men and never seen again.
After Tuvia Bielski’s parents and other relatives were murdered in the Novogrudok ghetto, he and his brothers, Zusya, Asael, and Aharon fled to the forest, where they set up a small partisan unit. They also sent a message back to the ghetto: “Organize as many friends and acquaintances as possible. Send them to us in the woods. We will be waiting for you.” Over the next two years, 1,200 men, women, and children joined Bielski’s family camp. Those who were able joined his partisan group. Unlike other partisan commanders, Bielski did not consider fighting the enemy his only goal. Instead, he held saving Jewish lives as his highest value, and unlike other partisans, he took in all Jews and refused to abandon the weak and the old.

“Don’t rush to fight and die. So few of us are left, we have to save lives. It is more important to save Jews than to kill Germans.” Tuvia Bielski

Father came with a big loaf of bread, dark peasant bread. He said that we must give the bread to Tuvia Bielski to eat because he, as a leader, must be well fed. But Tuvia refused to take it. Our father begged him, but he would not. ‘You must give it to your children. I cannot take it from you.’

"Tuvia cried like a child, but he absolutely refused to touch the bread. I will never forget the picture, how these two men argued about the bread."

(Excerpt from the testimony of Luba Dworecki)

“I returned to Iskra, Tuvia was there visiting us. I told him, ‘I just met twenty people, they were going to join you. How will you take them in? How will you manage?’

‘Zorach, you know what a Belorussian bread looks like. We have a man in the kitchen who cuts the bread. He has an order from the cook to cut it in twenty to thirty pieces. After the new arrivals his order will be to cut the bread into forty pieces, so each of the slices will not be as big. To the bucket of soup we will pour another pail of water and we will add some more potatoes and wheat. Rest assured that no one will die of hunger. If more and more will come that is good!’

(Excerpt from the testimony of Zorach Arluck)
Life in the partisan group was sometimes very sad, but at times uplifting. Our first task was to save as many Jewish lives as possible and therefore, we accepted everybody who was Jewish into our group, including women and children. Many Polish partisans asked us to join them on one condition: that we leave behind all the women and children. But we knew that if we left them, they would not survive even for one week, that it would be a sure death for them. We had about 20 children all under the age of ten and about ten elderly women. All the rest were able to carry weapons.

I would like to mention one special case. A couple with four children aged four, six, eight and ten had fled under fire when the Germans were liquidating the ghetto of Przemyslan and had reached a neighboring village. There, they heard about our partisan band in the forest and came to join us. A few months later, the father contracted typhus and died; we buried him in the forest, but the widow and her four children survived the war with us and she now lives in Ra’anana, Israel, with all her children and grandchildren nearby. In April 1991, I visited her and she told me that she would always remember that it was only by being with us in the forest that she survived.

Isidore Karten, Survival in the Forest, The Swirz Camp, p. 68, Yad Vashem Publishers
I Shall Betray Tomorrow

I shall betray tomorrow, not today.
Today, pull out my fingernails,
I shall not betray.
You do not know the extent of my courage,
I surely do
You are five, with harsh hands bearing rings,
Wearing hobnailed boots.
I shall betray tomorrow, not today.
Tomorrow.
I need the night to make up my mind.
I need at least one night,
To disown, to abjure, to betray.
To disown my friends,
To abjure bread and wine,
To betray life,
To die
I shall betray tomorrow, not today.
The file is under the tile
The file is not for the bar
The file is not for the hangman
The file is for my hand
Today I have nothing to say
I shall betray tomorrow.

Attributed to Marianne Cohn

Marianne Cohn, daughter of Dr. Alfred and Gerta (Radt) Cohn, was born in 1922 in Mannheim, Germany, and moved to Berlin with her family. After the Nazis’ rise to power, they fled to Spain, and from there moved to France.
In France, Marianne became active in the Jewish Scouts movement (EIF), and in 1942, she also joined the Zionist youth movement (MJS). In 1943, she was living in Grenoble. When underground activists including Mila Racine were arrested in the course of smuggling a group of children into Switzerland, Marianne was asked to take Mila’s place. She was given false papers under the name of Marie Colin, and succeeded in bringing several groups of children over the border into Switzerland.
On 31 May 1944, Marianne was caught by a German patrol while travelling in a truck with 28 children aged 4-15. Marianne claimed that they were on their way to a holiday resort in the area, but this claim was refuted and she and the children were sent to prison in the Pax hotel in Annemasse, one section of which had been converted into a Gestapo jail. Jean Deffaugt, Mayor of Annemasse, managed to free the younger children, and made it possible for Marianne and the 11 older children to work in the town, but each night they had to return to prison. In the letters she sent from prison, Marianne expressed hope for her ultimate fate and great concern for the children’s lives. One of the 28 children, then ten-year-old Renée Koenig (Bornstein), who was incarcerated in the Prison du Pax together with her brother and sister, recalls:

“Marianne’s friends in the underground made a plan to rescue her, but she feared for the children’s lives, and rejected all rescue attempts. On 8 July 1944, Marianne was taken from the prison, tortured and brutally murdered by French militiamen. Her body was discovered after the war. All 28 children who were caught together with Marianne survived in Annemasse.”

A group of children who survived thanks to Marianne Cohn and Mila Racine
Annemasse, France, 18 August 1944
“I remember the moment that they caught us. They locked all the children into a room. All around were policemen who asked us if we were Jewish. I told the children that they have to drink a lot of water, because there was nothing to eat. Not one of them cried. They were so frightened, and we started to curse and to tell the policemen that they were murderers of children... Suddenly I saw two trucks outside with swastikas. I saw a door, I opened it and saw bathrooms with a small window. I thought: this is it, I'm going to escape and I said to everyone, "Whoever wants, should flee. If not, you will never see anyone again. You will be in a place of no return..." Just three days before crossing the border, I approached one of the first houses I saw in one of the fields and knocked on the door. The house-owner said through the window, "We don't give handouts to gypsies here." I told her, "We are not gypsies, we are Jewish children." A few minutes later, her daughter came out and gave us food, and the owners invited us to stay with them.... The contact with the smuggler was made via the owner of the house we were staying in. On 10 September 1943, the smuggler arrived and ordered us to walk 5 km in 45 minutes, until we reached Swiss territory. The fence was about 2 meters high, and the smuggler cut it on both sides of the border. As we were starting to move, one of the children ran in the opposite direction and I said to him, "You could die, I'll smack you!" I had no choice but to frighten him, and thus I succeeded in returning him to us. During the escape, I also went back to rescue a three-year-old girl. We were happy to have crossed over, but then I asked, "Where's Margalit?" I saw her in the demilitarized zone. I didn't think at all, I just ran back, took her, and suddenly I heard that they were shooting at me. I ran in a zigzag, like they taught us to do in the children's home when a snake is chasing you.”

Excerpts from Fanny Ben Ami’s testimony, Yad Vashem Archives
Fanny Ben-Ami was born in 1930 in Baden-Baden, Germany, to Hirsch and Yohanna-Hannah Eyal. When Hitler rose to power, her family fled to Paris. Following the German occupation in May 1940, Fanny and her sisters were sent to the Château de Chaumont with the help of the OSE, an organization that rendered aid to Jewish children. In July 1942, the children in the orphanage were scattered due to an informant. The OSE transferred Fanny and her aunt to the Alps, where Fanny began to aid the resistance. After eavesdropping on a local businessman's phone call, she warned them about a raid the Germans were planning. When the OSE decided to smuggle Fanny and a group of children into Switzerland, her mother took her to the bus and said, "Who knows if we'll see each other again?" They never did. A seventeen-year-old was leading the group of children. When the group got close to the border zone, the teenager panicked at the massive German presence in the area and refused to go on. For lack of an alternative, Fanny took command and smuggled the children in a postal train to Annemasse. From there, they tried to reach the border in trucks, but they were caught by French gendarmes on patrol. The children were interrogated and imprisoned, but Fanny managed to get them out through a bathroom window. Once outside, Fanny ordered the children to march while singing, as if they were on vacation, so as not to draw suspicion. The group escaped to the forest and Fanny managed to smuggle them into Switzerland.
One of the unique phenomena of the Holocaust period was the rescue of Jewish children in France: a network of protective homes established by different organizations, both Jewish and Christian, whose members rescued children and brought them to remote places, in order to protect them from persecution and enable them to live a normal life under abnormal circumstances. Thanks to this rescue endeavor, thousands of Jewish children were saved.

The Children's Aid Society - OSE (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants) maintained children's homes with the financial assistance of the American Joint Distribution Committee and French Jewish communal organisations. The directors and staff at these homes were idealistic young men and women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who treated the children in their care with affection and tenderness. OSE activists would enter the detention camps of their own free will, in order to make contact with the children and their parents, and gain their trust and eventual consent to attempt to smuggle the children out of the camps and bring them to OSE homes and other hiding places.

“The children in our care laughed during the day and cried at night”

Rachel Plodmacher-Levine

Ehud Loeb was born in southwest Germany and was deported from there in 1940 with his family to a camp in southern France. Ehud was sent to a children's home in 1941; his family was deported to Auschwitz in 1942. Later, he was placed with several Catholic families in central France. When it became too dangerous, he was again placed in children's homes, and also hid in forests until the end of the occupation. He arrived in Israel in 1958.

In his testimony, he recalls:

“The many, most difficult memories I have are from there, from the Gurs camp. My beloved grandmother, Sophie, died there. She couldn't stand the terrible conditions, and died after about three weeks. I was six-and-a-half years old, and I helped build stone paths in the swampy mud... I didn't see Father anymore once I arrived in Gurs... Everything was grey and cold. Rain fell ceaselessly, and I had to sleep on a pile of damp straw that served as a bed.”
Two French-speaking people came and stood next to me with Mother, who was very pale. Mother lifted me up, hugged me with all the strength she had left, and whispered in my ear: 'Go with them Herbert... They will take you to a good place. They will take care of you, and afterwards I will come...' Before I had the chance to respond, I was already being held by the man who exited the hut quickly and ran with me to the gate."

I remember that I travelled on a truck with lots of other children. I remember that I arrived at a big house that served as a children’s home. I was seven years old, and for the first time I was living with children... I slept on a .... soft bed in "Chateau Chabannes".

At night, I cried because I wanted my mother and father... the nurses and caregivers did everything to make me heal and feel good, and I was wracked with yearning... I decided that I would not longer be me. I would be another boy... So that other boy, whose French name was Hubert, played games, enjoyed the sunshine, and ate his fill."
With the first arrests and deportations of Belgian Jews in the summer of 1942, a group of Jews and non-Jews initiated the establishment of the “Committee for the Defense of Jews” (CDJ), an underground organization. The organization comprised communists, Zionists, and members of the Independent Front, a faction of the Belgian resistance. The CDJ made contacts, raised funds and worked mainly to hide Jews. A special department dealt with rescuing children. A network of couriers located Jewish children and found hiding places for them in children's homes, monasteries and with families.

Maurice Heiber was one of the main activists in the children's department of the CDJ. He and his wife were arrested in the Mechelen/Malines camp, where they were held for 8 months. In November 1944, Maurice Heiber wrote a report about the activities of the children's department up until their arrest:

"The committee for the location of hiding places for children started its work with the coordination of hiding place options, answering requests, and arranging contact with the parents. What a sensitive mission!... The courier on behalf of the Committee would say to the mother: "They told me..." "Who told you?" "A secret organization".

Very slowly, the mother would begin to trust her. She could feel that we were battling on her behalf, on her child's behalf. She would be in a state, because they had discovered her in her house, where she would often be living illegally, and in constant terror of her hunters. At this point, one of the most heroic acts would occur: The mother would give her consent to deliver her child into the hands of a stranger, into the hands of a secret organization. What a demonstration of a Jewish mother's love for her child, her one and only treasure. She parts from him, perhaps forever, in the clear knowledge that she could be arrested at any moment, deported and led to her death..."
Andree Geulen, a CDJ activist recognized as Righteous Among the Nations, recalls:

“When fetching the children, we would never tell the parents where we would hide them. I am aware of how cruel this must have been for the parents to hand their children over to an unknown person (naturally we couldn’t tell them who we were and only introduced ourselves as members of the resistance) and who wouldn’t even tell them where they were taking their child. But this was an indispensable security measure. Actually, we had learned from experience that even if we gave the parents the addresses on condition that they promise not to go see their children, they couldn’t keep from going to visit them, thus compromising their security…

I once had to take a two-year old child, Charles S. to a farmer family in Vezenbeck. But they were already hiding two children, and I was supposed to take the two children back and bring them somewhere else. When I got to the family, I saw that both children were infected with scabies. It was obvious that I couldn’t leave little Charles there, and took him back with me to the boarding house where I was staying before I could find him another place. The same night there was a round up at the boarding house, and the little boy was taken to Malines [transit camp]. The orphaned children were not deported to the camps but put in official Jewish institutions. Maurice Heiber, who was in Malines, managed to help us get the child out of the camp and arranged for him to be put in the St. Pierre Hospital under the pretext that he had diphtheria. There he supposedly “died” and we placed him under a false name with the gardeners…

Often when we went to see the Jewish families we would find ourselves in the middle of a roundup: blocked roads, soldiers at all corners and trucks for the transport of the people caught in the hunt. Fortunately we almost always managed to save some children… we would pass the roadblocks with one child in a pram, holding the hands of two others. The soldiers would shy away from a mother with many children. Thus the children were saved, but the parents…”

Yad Vashem Archives
All Jewish life on the Aryan side could be summarized in one word: fear. Fear of the Germans, fear of the Poles... fear of losing one’s melina [hiding place] and fear of being left without a groszen. Fear was a constant companion, both of those who had Aryan features – the fair hair, blue eyes, and snub nose that meant freedom to walk the streets – and those who because of their typically Jewish appearance had to keep out of sight in Gentile lodgings.

The so-called "Aryans" had to blend with their surroundings, adopt Polish customs, habits and mannerisms, celebrate the Christian festivals, and of course go to church. They had to watch each movement, lest it betray nervousness of unfamiliarity with the routine; weigh every word, lest it betray a Jewish accent. At all costs, one must avoid betraying oneself; one must not appear in any way different from the others...

Nevertheless, there were always certain trivial but telltale signs that could not be controlled, and these could betray one's identity. For example, lack of known relatives or fear of cultivating Gentile friendships aroused mistrust. Worst of all were the eyes. A careworn face might be transformed by a smile, an accent could be controlled, church customs and prayers learned, but the eyes... How could one hide the mute melancholy, the haunted look of fear?

Time and again, our Gentile friends would say, "Your eyes give you away. Make them livelier, merrier – you won’t attract so much attention then". But the eyes kept constantly watching, searching the shadows ahead, looking quickly behind, seeing our own misfortune, foreseeing even worse for our nearest and dearest. The eyes, haunted by fear of betrayal, haunted and betrayed us themselves, and only increased out fear."

Vladka Meed, "On Both Sides of the Wall", © Ghetto Fighters' House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, pp. 245-6
To the Jews in hiding... at the sight of one of our couriers, those tired, pale, haunted faces would suddenly come alive, the eyes would gleam, the tears would begin to trickle down the palled hollow cheeks. They had not been forgotten! Hope and faith would be renewed, anxious questions about family, friends, life on the outside. To some, the days of these visits were all they lived for. The courier was one of the few people they could trust, one of the few they did not have to fear.”

Vladka Meed, "On Both Sides of the Wall", © Ghetto Fighters' House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, p. 255

“Standing Up to Evil, A Zionist’s Underground Rescue Activities in Hungary”, by Peretz Revesz, pp. 70-71, Yad Vashem Publications
I recall two stirring episodes that took place in early 1944. Meir Rosenker, a senior member of Poalei Zion and his wife were among the Polish refugees who arrived at our place. Their two daughters, who were both around ten years old, had assumed Christian identities and had been left behind with a friendly Polish Catholic family. The parents’ reasoning was that their chance of being rescued in this manner was better than through the usual escape route. When they finally felt safe in Hungary, before the Germans invaded it, they regretted their decision to leave their daughters behind and gave us the address where they were staying. I transmitted the address to one of the most reliable smugglers. A short time later, a group of refugees, including the two little girls, arrived. I went up to them immediately and asked them if the name Rosenker was familiar to them. They answered affirmatively, with tears in their eyes. I happened to know that their father, Meir, was in the building at the time and I went to look for him. Their reunion was very touching, one of the most beautiful episodes that I can recall from that period of my activities.

The second case involved another refugee from Poland, a doctor by the name of Dr. May. She was a small and delicate woman. Shortly after we had worked out an "initial arrangement" for her, she again approached me, and I immediately discerned that she had a strong and courageous personality. She informed me that she intended to return to Poland to retrieve her two children, whom she had left with a Polish family. I tried to persuade her... not to endanger herself by embarking on a mission that seemed almost impossible, but she presented solid arguments. Her conscience was tormenting her for having abandoned her children. She felt strongly about her decision, despite the dangers and the efforts required. We finally gave in and provided her with information about our "trips", money and certificates. She came back with her two children, happy and fulfilled."

"Standing Up to Evil, A Zionist’s Underground Rescue Activities in Hungary", by Peretz Revesz, p. 148, Yad Vashem Publications
Rabbi Nathan Cassuto of the Jewish community of Florence, Italy, took action to aid the community and the numerous refugees who came to the city. The Rabbi rode his bicycle from house to house, imploring the Jews to hide in remote villages and monasteries outside the city. But when he contacted Archbishop Elia Dalla Costa, a unique cooperative relationship between the two community leaders began. Archbishop Dalla Costa also brought his ecclesiastical subordinates and monasteries into the rescue network. Father Cipriano Ricotti testified that the Archbishop had given him a dispatch for the monasteries, “many of which might not have opened their gates, were it not for the letter.” In late 1943, an informer led to the arrest of many members of the rescue committee. Rabbi Cassuto was sent to Auschwitz, and the other Jewish members of the network went underground. Despite the danger, the clergy and monks took full responsibility to continue the activity. The rescue efforts in Florence, which began thanks to the Rabbi and the Archbishop’s cooperation, kept going until the end of the German occupation, and hundreds, if not thousands, of Jewish lives were saved thanks to them.

“In September 1943, things completely changed when the Germans entered most areas of Italy... Persecution of a totally different nature began. The Germans’ first act on entering the city was to make a list of the Jews living there. They went door to door, evicted the Jews and moved them to the transit camp... I was in Florence at the time. There was great turmoil amongst the Jews, but they didn’t fully understand the danger. My brother, Dr. Nathan Cassuto, tried to make the Jews aware of the danger, went from house to house and tried to persuade them to enter convents, to escape to the villages, to hide under assumed identities. Together with a priest, he organized an assistance committee... there were rumors about gas chambers, but the Jews believed that that could not happen here. They thought that in this period too, it would be possible to live and that the Germans would be satisfied with the discrimination that the Fascists had already introduced. Of course, that’s not what happened...”

From Hulda Campagnano’s testimony at the Eichmann trial
After he was freed from the pressing worry for his own family, my brother continued with all his energy to help the general Jewish population. Not only the local Jews merited his attention: at that time, Florence was flooded with Jewish refugees who came from northern Italy and from southern France in order to cross the front into southern Italy, and longed-for freedom. They only had one address: the community Rabbi. And he took care of them all – with money, food coupons under assumed names, advice, train tickets, and places to stay, for one night or more. The monasteries came to his aid. Nathan quickly felt that he could not bear the weight of the difficult mission that he had undertaken alone, and he established a kind of committee, made up of a limited number of friends, some Jewish, some Christian... Meanwhile, there were arrests here and there in the city... the rumors that swiftly spread made Nathan's work much easier, maybe even superfluous. But tangible assistance was made increasingly harder. Each time, the committee met somewhere else so that it would be difficult to trace.

Hulda Campagnano, "To the Generation That Does Not Know", © Kedem Publishers. Translated and reprinted with the permission of the author's heirs