T he American Society for Yad Vashem (ASYV), in partnership with the Jewish Life Foundation, hosted its third annual Salute to Hollywood Benefit Gala on Monday, June 6th, at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Beverly Hills. The inspirational evening brought together 350 new and returning supporters of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Emcee Mike Burstyn opened the event by introducing singer Michael Libow, who led the audience in the national anthems.

Center. Emcee Mike Burstyn

World Holocaust Remembrance

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For many years, the Hollywood community has been an essential partner in spreading the mission of Holocaust education and remembrance. Starting in 1945, the year that marked the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration camps, films and documentaries struggling with the incomprehensible reality that was the Holocaust have been produced.

Inspiration for this year’s ASYV Gala came from a new source in the Hollywood community. Last December, The Hollywood Reporter published its groundbreaking story, “Hollywood’s Last Survivors.” The writers inspired us with their treatment of each survivor’s story, demonstrating great care and respect for every individual name, photo and memory. The beautifully written article mirrors Yad Vashem’s personal approach to and Janice have challenged us to do better and to be better through this article, which shines a bright light so that we will not forget these stories.” Peter Flax, principal author of “Hollywood’s Last Survivors,” said, “Hearing these stories is an experi-

moving introduction Goldwyn stated, “[Meyer] has never failed to speak out so that the sacrifices [of our people] are not lost to the sands of time. He is dedicated to effecting change in the world, so that the power of love and tolerance can subdue evil.” Both of these individuals have had a profound influence in the Hollywood community and were featured in The Hollywood Reporter’s article.

We also had the pleasure of honoring philanthropist David Wiener. A survivor of Auschwitz, David built his real estate empire from the ground up with hard work and determination. David is a true leader in the community — his generosity knows no bounds. Adam Milstein presented David with our Lifetime Achievement Award and the evening concluded with guests singing “Happy Birthday” to Wiener, celebrating his 90th birthday, and wishing him a huge Mazal Tov on his marriage the day before the event.

These three Holocaust sur-

vivors, as well as the others who were able to join us at the gala, truly enhanced the evening. Those strong men and women sur-

vived under such dire circumstances and have taught us the meaning of perseverance and determination. It is on their shoulders that we are able to thrive and hope for a better future.

This message was brought home after hearing from Yad Vashem repre-

sentative Irena Steinfeldt, director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department. Irena recounted stories of inspiring heroes from the entertain-

ment industry in Eastern Europe who saved Jews from the horrors of the Holocaust. The Righteous, along with our survivors, have established a foundation of kindness and charity that we can only hope to emulate for generations to come.

Thanks to our generous supporters and new friends in the community, this was our most successful event yet in Los Angeles. We surpassed our fundraising goal and have set new records for the future. We look forward to planting roots in the community and growing our Yad Vashem family.
Jewish Holocaust survivors return to Libya from concentration camp Bergen-Belsen.

Among the prisoners liberated on that glorious day in April were several hundred Libyan Jews, deported to Bergen-Belsen via Italy. A photo exists of these survivors, dangling their legs out of a railway carriage on which they had scrawled, “Going home” and “Back to Tripoli.”

According to The Jews of Libya by Professor Maurice Roumani, some 870 out of the 2,000 Jews in Libya with British passports were deported to Italy as part of the “sfolamento” policy to send away foreign nationals. Members of the same family could be dispersed to Morocco, Tunisia or Algeria — then under pro-Nazi, Vichy French control.

Two transports of 300 Jews, and another 120, were shipped from Libya to Naples then placed on cargo trains to Bergen-Belsen, and arrived on May 25, 1944. Jews arriving from Libya in Bologna were taken by train to Innsbruck-Reichenau, part of the Dachau camp system, in July 1943.

Reaching Bergen-Belsen relatively late in the war, the Libyan Jews survived. Some were exchanged for German POWs. They received packages from the Red Cross and obtained some relief in their working conditions. They even managed to keep kosher, exchanging cooked food for dry bread. One Jew, Zia Labi from Benghazli, started a school.

The deportation of Jews from Libya to the northern shores of the Mediterranean gives the lie to the widespread misconception that the Holocaust touched only European Jews. Although their suffering cannot be compared to the horrors inflicted on the Jews of Eastern Europe, Jews in North Africa were not spared the impact of the war. Some 2,500 Libyan Jews were shipped by the Italian Fascist regime to the notorious Giado labor camp. One-fifth died of typhus or starvation.

Neighboring Tunisia came under direct Nazi control for six months. Some 2,000 Tunisian Jewish men, wearing the obligatory yellow star, were frog-marched into labor camps. Jews were used as slave labor in Algerian and Moroccan work camps. And all the while, thousands of Jews died in aerial bombardments as the Allied and German armies wrestled for control.

Arguably, North African states, having not yet achieved independence, were not responsible for the anti-Jewish measures adopted by the Vichy regime and the Italian Fascists. But apart from individuals who saved Jews, the sympathies of the Arab masses broadly lay with the Germans.

Iraq, independent since 1923, was the scene of a pro-Nazi coup in 1941, leading inexorably to the Farhud, the Iraqi-Jewish Kristallnacht. In this two-day orgy of murder, rape, mutilation and looting, up to 600 Jews were killed, according to British archival records. The exact figure will never be known.

The Palestinian Grand Mufti of Jerusalem played a central role in plotting the pro-Nazi coup in Iraq. In exile in Berlin from November 1941 until the end of the war, he broadcast anti-Jewish propaganda to the Arab world.

He proved more zealous than the Nazis in promoting the “Final Solution” to the Jewish question. The mufti is thought to have been directly responsible for 20,000 European Jews murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. At the end of World War II, the mufti should have been tried as a war criminal at Nuremberg. He was indicted, judged and convicted by Yugoslav for crimes against humanity, arising from his pivotal role in the Handschar and Skanderbeg SS divisions, which deported Balkan Jews from Kosovo, Macedonia and Thrace. But the Allies shrank from offending the Arabs. The mufti remained a hero for tens of thousands.

Nazi Germany lavished money and propaganda on the Arab world in the hope of fomenting an anti-colonial uprising. It funded the Muslim Brotherhood, established in Egypt in 1928. Its founder, Hassan al-Banna, made the Nazi concept of the Jew as the epitome of all-embracing evil, overlaid with traditional anti-Jewish Koranic prejudice, the core of the Brotherhood’s ideology. By the war’s end, the Brotherhood had a million members.

Shortly after the Belsen survivors had returned to Libya, the Jews of Tripoli and outskirts of Tunis suffered a vicious three-day pogrom, which claimed the lives of 130 and made thousands of Jews homeless.

How was this possible barely six months after news of the terrible extermination of the Jews of Europe had reached the Arab world? The November 1945 Libyan riots were a spillover from disturbances in Egypt in which five Jews were murdered. While some blame the clash of Zionism and Arab nationalism, historians report that the rioters in Libya did not shout anti-Zionist slogans. A mob did not even know what Zionism was, a Jewish Agency report stated. It is noteworthy that the Egyptian rioters, incited by the Muslim Brotherhood, targeted Coptic, Greek Orthodox and Catholic institutions as well as Jews.

It is common to view the mass exodus and spoliation of a million Jews from the Arab world as revenge for the displacement of Palestinian Arabs in 1948. A more plausible explanation is that Nazi-inspired blood-and-soil nationalism, and xenophobic Islamism, which had entrenched themselves in the Arab world over the preceding decade, aimed to destroy, or at best exclude, non-Muslim minorities from public and political life.

In 1947 the Arab League drafted a plan to treat its Jewish citizens as enemy aliens, before a single Palestinian Arab had fled. Barely three years after the end of World War II, the Arab world gave safe haven to Nazi war criminals on the run. They became military advisors and spin doctors of Jew-hatred.

Adolph Eichmann, Nazi architect of the “Final Solution,” hoped his “Arab friends” would continue his battle against the Jews, who were always the “principal war criminals” and “principal aggressors.” He hadn’t managed to complete his task of “total annihilation,” but the Muslims could still complete it for him.

Not only has the virus of Nazi anti-Semitism never left the Arab and Muslim world, it has grown exponentially. Muslim immigrants have carried the virus of Jew-hatred back into European countries. Saudi petrodollars have financed the spread of Islamism, with its implicit anti-Semitism, worldwide.

Eichmann would have been pleased to see that the Arab world is effectively safe haven to Nazi war criminals on the run. They became military advisors and spin doctors of Jew-hatred. Islamism, which had entrenched themselves in the Arab world over the preceding decade, aimed to destroy, or at best exclude, non-Muslim minorities from public and political life.

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NEVER TOO LATE: NAZI HUNTERS TIRELESSLY PURSUE 50 ELDERLY WAR CRIMINALS

BY IAN JOHNSTON AND ANDY ECKARDT, NBC NEWS.

Most of those involved in the murder of about six million Jews in the Holocaust and still alive will now be in their 90s, a ripe old age for people who carried out one the most heinous crimes in the history of humanity.

But that doesn’t stop Kurt Schrimm, director of Germany’s Central Investigation Center for Nazi Crimes. His agency employs 20 people, including seven focusing on the Auschwitz cases.

“Someday there will be no more Nazi criminals to go after, and then our organization will shut down,” he said. “But until then, we will exhaust all investigation possibilities.”

After years of frustration, Nazi hunters have also been given fresh hope by a German court’s landmark ruling that has made it simpler to bring prosecutions.

“Until that point … German prosecutors could not try a case unless they had evidence of a specific crime with a specific victim,” he said.

Demjanjuk was convicted solely for his service as an armed SS guard at a death camp, he added. “As a result, this opened up a whole new potential number of people to bring to justice.”

“Once the Nuremberg trials had been completed [in 1949], the prosecution of Nazi war criminals never became a serious priority in any country outside of the Soviet Union,” Zuroff added. “The failure to do more to hold the perpetrators of the Holocaust accountable is naturally a source of frustration and disappointment for me personally, as someone who has devoted practically my entire adult life to that mission.”

“The Holocaust saw approximately six million Jews — about two-thirds of the pre-World War II Jewish population in Europe — murdered by the Third Reich. The killers, be they Hitler’s infamous “Final Solution,” Roma Gypsies, Slavic people such as Poles and Russians, Communists, socialists, disabled people, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals and others were also slaughtered in large numbers.”

Zuroff said that “to their credit” Germany was among five countries in the second-highest group.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center publishes an annual “most wanted” list, and also rates countries based on their willingness to take action. Only the United States got the top rating in 2013. Germany was among five countries in the second-highest group.

Zuroff said that “to their credit” Germany was one of the few countries that would bring prosecutions.

In contrast, Austria, which became part of Hitler’s Third Reich in 1938, was “horrific, terrible, the worst,” Zuroff said.

“They haven’t succeeded in taking action against a Nazi war criminal in more than 30 years. It’s not because there are no Nazis in Austria,” he said. “There’s a country that until 20 years ago gave way with compliance they were Hitler’s first victim. Austrians played a very leading role in the murders carried out by the Third Reich.”

Zuroff said it was “impossible” to get prosecutions in the Baltic countries, “especially in Lithuania.”

“They were the worst because they had a vast number of collaborators,” he said. “They don’t like punishing their own people and would prefer to think of themselves as victims of Communism and not killers of Jews, which they were. They were outstanding killers of Jews.”

“A few members of the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s list of most wanted Nazi war criminals.”

“Andreas Kepiro, who was a 10-year-old boy when the Holocaust saw the massacre and the gendarmes referring to lists of names when deciding who should be taken.”

She said “Shanny” was a nickname for Sandor Kepiro, a gendarme officer accused of helping organize the killings.

Kepiro was given a 10-year prison sentence over the Novi Sad massacre by a Hungarian court in 1944, but this was overturned after Germany formally occupied Hungary later that year, according to The Associated Press.

Kepiro, who lived in Argentina after the war, admitted he was present and supervised the identities of those being rounded up, but denied know-

Reviewed by Dr. Diane Cyphkin

According to Henry Eaton in his conscientiously researched and engagingly volume entitled The Origins and Onset of the Romanian Holocaust, “historians in Romania have characteristically of protecting its Jews during World War II and have described wartime dictator Ion Antonescu as a savior, pointing out that he rejected a German plan to deport Romanian Jews to the Belzec death camp.” How ironic! What a mean-spirited, deceptively merry fact! Then again, Romanians are not alone in presenting this fairy-tale-like story of their country during the war years. There are others who eagerly worked “shoulder to shoulder” with the Nazis and have, like them, also deftly manipulated the truth, . . . going so far as to label themselves unwilling “victims” of Hitler’s actions and directives. So what did really happen in Romania? What is the true story? As Eaton tells it, anti-Semitism was always characteristic of this nation from its very inception in the mid-1800s. And it would only grow with the years. The source of it was the Romanian Orthodox Church, which viewed Jews as Christ-killers, “betraying” them. Thus, the idea of Jews using the blood of murdered Christian children as a pan “Der-some kind of “ritual” at Passover also found a “ready and willing” audience here. Another reason for Romanian anti-Semitism was “the growing number and commercial prominence of Jews in this country during the war years. Eaton goes on to relate how “under pressure of world opinion, what completely irritated the Romanians was the very idea that the Jews of Romania be made Romanian citizens! Because of the above-noted, throughout the years, aside from suffering from bloodthirsty outside invaders, including the Cossacks, Turks and Russians, Jews in Romania suffered no less from their non-Jewish countrymen. Time and again the hate-filled rhetoric of the Romanian leadership — indeed, the country’s “elite” — encouraged attacks on Jewish villages. All kinds of “hostile laws” were passed making it difficult for Jews to earn a living, get an education, and even dream of becoming true Romanians! Soldering during World War II didn’t make any difference. In fact, during the inter-war years, things got even worse for the Jews of Romania! It was during this time that the arch anti-Semitic Corneliu Codreanu and his Party of the Iron Guard turned “to solu- tion” to the “problem” of Jews in their country. Interestingly, “in 1930 Codreanu promised to ship Jews out of Romania in cattle cars as soon as he had the power to do so.” Finally, King Carol II passed laws in 1940 “similar to the Reich citizenship laws of 1935 making further drastic reductions in the status of Jews.” Needless to say, it’s not at all surpris- ing that Romania would eagerly and willingly become a land of “hostile enemies and “exploiting” it at the expense of the natives.” Finally, as they were frequent- ly pressured by world opinion, what completely irritated the Romanians was the very idea that the Jews of Romania be made Romanian citizens! Because of the above-noted, throughout the years, aside from suffering from bloodthirsty outside invaders, including the Cossacks, Turks and Russians, Jews in Romania suffered no less from their non-Jewish countrymen. Time and again the hate-filled rhetoric of the Romanian leadership — indeed, the country’s “elite” — encouraged attacks on Jewish villages. All kinds of “hostile laws” were passed making it difficult for Jews to earn a living, get an education, and even dream of becoming true Romanians! Soldering during World War II didn’t make any difference. In fact, during the inter-war years, things got even worse for the Jews of Romania! It was during this time that the arch anti-Semitic Corneliu Codreanu and his Party of the Iron Guard turned “to solu- tion” to the “problem” of Jews in their country. Interestingly, “in 1930 Codreanu promised to ship Jews out of Romania in cattle cars as soon as he had the power to do so.” Finally, King Carol II passed laws in 1940 “similar to the Reich citizenship laws of 1935 making further drastic reductions in the status of Jews.” Needless to say, it’s not at all surpris- ing that Romania would eagerly and willingly become a land of “hostile enemies and “exploiting” it at the expense of the natives.” Finally, as they were frequent- ly pressured by world opinion, what completely irritated the Romanians was the very idea that the Jews of Romania be made Romanian citizens! Because of the above-noted, throughout the years, aside from suffering from bloodthirsty outside invaders, including the Cossacks, Turks and Russians, Jews in Romania suffered no less from their non-Jewish countrymen. Time and again the hate-filled rhetoric of the Romanian leadership — indeed, the

When Poland Eyed Madagascar as a Future Homeland for Jews

In Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning, Yale University historian Timothy Snyder examines the origins of the Holocaust in the mind of Adolf Hitler and the geopolitics of prewar Europe. To restore the “natural order” of the planet, Hitler believed, Jews had to be eliminated, “cruelty and greed” in doing the devil’s work. Why did Antonescu refuse to send his Jews to the Belzec death camp? After all, it did “fit” with his “philos- ophy”? I’ll let Eaton tell it in his book — a must-read for any study of the Holocaust.

Dr. Diane Cyphkin is a Professor of Media, Communication, and Visual Arts at Pace University.

(Continued on page 15)
THE HOLOCAUST WITHOUT JEWS

Attempts to universalize the specific suffering of Jews in the Shoah go hand in hand with efforts to delegitimize the Jewish state.

BY JAMES KIRCHICK, TABLET

In May, Israeli marked Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yom HaShoah. As has been the custom for over six decades, a two-minute air raid siren was blared across the entire country and citizens from all walks of life interrupted their daily routines for a moment of solemn reflection. January 27 of this year also marked the decade anniversary of the United Nations–designated International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which member states are encouraged to commemorate. Though an Israeli initiative, International Holocaust Remembrance Day has gradually been subjected to the universalizing prescriptions of those who wish to water down the particularly Jewish aspect of the Nazi extermination of the Jews.

The two different days of Holocaust commemoration and the ways they increasingly run counter to each other are symptomatic of the seizure of Jewish history and suffering for ulterior purposes. This victim displacement appropriates the most tragic experience in Jewish history, pointedly erases the specificity of the events supposedly being commemorated, and then harshly chides Jews for inserting their own particularistic concerns into the discussion. At a certain point, these phenomena become a continuation of a specific form of oppression and erasure rather than an antidote to “hatred.”

Imagine a remembrance of slavery that did not acknowledge the suffering of African Americans — or a commemoration of the AIDS epidemic omitting the experiences of gay men. Such acts of dissociation would be inconceivable, the subjects of rightful denunciations and outraged protests. Yet in recent years, that is precisely what has been going on with regard to the Holocaust and its chief victims, the Jews. Last May, the National Union of Students (NUS) — which claims to represent some seven million students — adopted a resolution of no confidence in the government concerning its “equivocal” extermination of six million Jews by relativizing it as just one of many “genocides” committed during World War II, the traditional Arab-Muslim denial or diminishment of the Holocaust as a grossly exaggerated event that pales in comparison to Israeli crimes, and a new pro–anti-Zionist narrative that changes Jewish suffering in its account of an amorphous, context-free misdeed — no worse, and holding no more mean- ing than any other inadvertent mass murder — inflicted upon some gener- alized notion of “humanity.” With respect to the latter, some go so far as to label the Holocaust an instance of “white on white crime” that, because its victims did not hail from the “global South,” is underserving of recognition.

Sometimes, speaking of a Holocaust without Jews can be innocuous, the result of a muddle-headed utopianism that desperately avoids singling out any one group’s suffering as having been worse than any other’s. When Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau omitted any mention of Jews or anti-Semitism in his first commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day, it was not due to any conscious bigotry on his part but a sort of purblind, mushy pro- progression. Still, it is distressing that the sort of Holocaust revisionism that was always the sole province of the far right and Arab nationalist–fueledly denying the Shoah while hijacking it to bully Jews as “the new Nazis” — is, in newfound form, becoming a badge of progressive virtue.

To understand the perverse logic of the Holocaust without Jews, one must work backward from the political end goal of those pushing it: the delegitimization of the Jewish State. For if the Holocaust isn’t about Jews, then Jews have no claim on their history, or reason to fear anti-Semitism, or the need for a state. The concept is straightforward: to be that Jews abused the Holocaust as a shakedown. Now, the Holocaust — at least as much as it was a crime targeting the Jews above all others — doesn’t exist at all. Labeling Muslims the “new Jews” of Europe when anti- Semitic crimes are at a post- war high — and almost entirely the doing of Muslims — is a particularly egregious form of this confiscation of Jewish history and inversion of reality. (In many schools across Europe, teachers report that they have difficulty teaching the Holocaust for fear of reprisals by Muslim students.) So too are the sanctimonious reprimands by soli- dist arbiters of good taste like the Atlantic’s Jim Fallow’s, who scold Jews for invoking the Holocaust to contextualize contemporary anti- Semitism. Ophuls’s film

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BY BEN FISHER, THE JERUSALEM POST

“S

much weight you could count my ribs. She would have lived to 100, but her mission was to take her brother up to heaven and watch over him,” Jerusalem resident Felicia Mizrachi related about her 94-year-old mother, Sophie Heclman. The Holocaust survivor died last month only days after Sol, the younger brother she saved during the Holocaust. The two siblings were buried in a double funeral in Jerusalem.

The intertwined lives and deaths of Sophie (nee Adler-Fleigel) and Sol took a dramatic turn in their hometown of Radom, Poland, when World War II broke out. The 17-year-old girl promised her parents, who were later killed along with one of Sophie’s sisters by the Nazis, that she would protect Sol, who was four years younger. Though she didn’t look typically Jewish and her Polish was perfect, Mizrachi says that nevertheless, her mother had to wear a yellow star. She says that Sophie’s life was saved by a righteous gentile.

Sophie became friends with a Polish girl who worked in her parents’ department store. She was someone who “didn’t understand why Jews were different and why the Nazis had decided to persecute them,” Mizrachi explains.

SS officers would frequent the store and flirt with the Polish girl. One SS officer felt madly in love and came in daily to see her. One day, she propositioned the officer: “If you really love me,” she said, “there is something you need to do. I need you to get me Polish papers for a girl my age. No questions asked.”

Sophie knew nothing of her friend’s plan until she received the papers that allowed her to leave the Radom ghetto to provide necessities for her family and grew very close. Eliezer Zev, Felicia’s father, owned a liquor store in Radom, was well connected and was able to bribe a Polish officer to procure a Red Cross uniform for Sophie, which she used to fake a medical evacuation in which Sol was carried out on a stretcher.

When he turned, I turned. When he was continuing to select people, I could see that those who had not been selected had been grouped into fives. “A girl in one of the groups spotted me and put four fingers up — they were one short. I don’t know how but I managed to stand with her and then we were all sent to work in Germany.”

Minia in 1954 with her daughter Denise.

Minia says: “We went from hell to heaven. I didn’t speak a word of English but the people were so kind to us.”

“Auschwitz you weren’t like a human being. I don’t know how we survived it.”

Twice-married Minia now lives in Golders Green, north London, and enjoys weekly bridge games at the nearby Holocaust and Jewish Care center.

“When I lost my parents it was terrible,” she said.

“You didn’t know if you wanted to survive. “Now I have got my daughter, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. That’s the only thing that keeps me going.”
The Jewish people have a debt they can never fully repay to those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. But the Jewish state has gone some way to provide for them in their old age.

BY NATHAN JEFFAY, THE TOWER

In a Jerusalem apartment, an elder-ly woman misses a roommate like no other. Together, the two of them cheated fate and formed a bond that would make a Jewish woman and a priest’s wife inseparable.

Galia Imshenik once used her status as a respectable Christian to shelter a young Jewish child, Elena Dolgov, during the Holocaust. Decades later, they ended up together in Jerusalem.

A set of three pictures on the wall of their apartment tells two life stories and one shared fate. There is a picture of the village in Belarus where Galina and her husband protected Elena throughout the Holocaust. There is a picture of St. Petersburg, where Elena lived afterwards. And there is a picture of Jerusalem, which the two women made their home in 1992.

During the war, Galina and her hus-band looked after Elena’s every need and even taught her to treat them as parents. Elena’s habit of speaking Yiddish was dangerous if other peo-ple were around, and the couple’s determination to teach her Russian saved her life when the Gestapo questioned them and left with the impression that Galina and her hus-band were Elena’s biological parents.

Six decades later, Elena looked after Galina’s every need, nursing her through a long illness until her death in 2011.

They shared the apartment in Jerusalem for almost 19 years. “It was a connection like a connection between mother and daughter,” Elena says, recalling the holidays they cele-brated together — both Jewish and Christian. “Our festivals were our fes-tivals and her festivals became our festivals.”

People with stories like Galina’s, individuals who found themselves drawn to Israel after rescuing Jews during the Holocaust, live dotted around Israel, rarely telling their sto ries to the media. All of them were born non-Jewish and therefore free from persecution by the Nazis. But they put their lives at risk by helping Jews and later immigrated to the Jewish state. Galina did so with the woman she saved, but many others did so alone, and since the 1980s they have been granted automatic re-sidency and recognition of their status as “righteous among the nations.”

Around 130 people have come to Israel via this unusual route, and the state treats them with reverence. The poverty of Holocaust survivors is a source of constant controversy, but those classed as righteous among the nations receive the country’s average salary as a monthly stipend from the government.

Today, only 13 are still alive.

In the northern Israel community of Kfar Tavor, one wonders what Robert Bossevain would have thought if he saw his daughter living here.

His decision to hide Jews for two and a half years during the Holocaust cost his children dearly. They didn’t just go hungry, watching their food stewed, but his wife was also told not to play with or even talk to other children, lest their secret slip out.

But none of this bothered Robert’s daughter Hester, who decided in her adulthood that she wanted to help the Jewish people once again.

In the early 1960s, the 27-year-old Hester, a newly qualified nurse, bought a one-way ticket and boarded a ship to Israel. “I thought that I could go somewhere with my profession, and remembered that in 1948 lots of refugees came to Israel,” Galina recalls pictures of thousands of immigrants arriving in Haifa,” she says.

As she speaks all these years later, she understates the unusual nature of her decision: “I said that if I would maybe go and help people with my profession where they need nurses, like Africa, why wouldn’t I go to Israel where they also need people? So I went to the Israeli embassy in Holland and said I want to go to Israel.”

Looking back on it now, she says it wasn’t only about wanting to help, but also about finding a place where she felt comfortable. Hester lost a great deal in the war. Her home was destroyed by the fighting, and her family’s wealth was confiscated. Her father Robert was a fearless resistance fighter who ended up in prison and then in the concen-tration camps. He collapsed and died moments before liberation.

As well as feeling weighed down by his father’s suffering and that Holland wasn’t the same country. “Holland changed after the war,” she says. “It was destroyed and the coun-try had to have a new life. But it was too organized and I said that I didn’t feel at home with all this organization, so I’ll go to Israel.”

In the young Jewish state, she cer-tainly found an antidote to over-organization. Arriving on a kibbutz to take up her first position as communi-ty nurse, she found chaos in the clinic, even discovering medicines and bullets in the same jars. “Within days she had the place shipshape, and was working far more than the required hour a day, offering counseling to trou-bled” young people.

She was soon cycling to two hospitals to provide medical care and working in a hospital. She tolled 16 hours a day at four jobs until she moved to Kfar Tavor and took a more generally position in the mid-1960s.

When she retired after decades in nursing, she made another contribu-tion to Israel, opening a cafe near her home that was operated entirely by people with disabilities. It made people rethink their relationship to dis-abled people, and gave its staff new skills and confidence. She helped to run the establishment until it closed two years ago.

The plethora of stories in Hester’s family defies belief.

There was the aunt who saved dozens of Jewish babies by carrying them away from the Nazis one by one in a backpack, and the banker uncle who managed to siphon off Nazi funds and pass them to Jews in hid-ing. And, of course, the story of her own parents and siblings.

Their role as rescuers began one afternoon in March 1943, when Hester’s father and mother Helena asking her to prepare dinner for guests at the Haarlem house where the family lived. That night, the Goldbergs arrived. They were an elder-ly couple and a daughter aged almost 30 from Russia, who had come to Holland through Finland and Germany looking for safety. “They came for dinner and stayed for two and a half years,” recalls Hester, adding that for some of the time the family also sheltered a Jewish dentist.

Their neighbors were Nazi collabo-rators, heightening the need for effec-tive surveillance. Hester’s father was fighting with the resistance, and her mother had to scrounge for food, devise plans for when soldiers called, and build outdoor ditches, and pre-serve peace in the tense household.

She sometimes served tulip bulbs in place of potatoes, and often cycled up to 75 miles — usually on metal wheels unchained by tires — to find food.

After the war, Helena remained in Holland but visited Israel several times, including a 1980 visit during which she and her husband received the Righteous Among the Nations award from Yad Vashem. She lived until she was 97, sometimes visiting the Goldbergs. “I always think even today how she did it all,” says Hester.

“How she kept us all alive, where she got the strength from.”

Some righteous among the nations developed personal connections to Jews before or after moving to Israel, and even converted to Judaism. Hester fell in love with a Jewish man on a kibbutz, married him, and opted for conversion “for the sake of our kids.” Other children of the “righteous” ended up marrying Jews. But the right of the “righteous” to live in Israel is automatic and does not require con-version or Jewish familial connec-tions. Many of them have not changed their beliefs and traditions since relocating to Israel.

Jaroslawa Lewicka told her story for this article a few days after Christmas, which she celebrated at a church near her home in the northern Israeli city of Haifa. She took part in services and a festive meal. It was a potluck affair, but she feels the need to point out, for the sake of full disclo-sure, that she didn’t make anything. Her fellow congregants forgave her, since she is, after all, 81 years old.

For decades, Jaroslawa lived under a Communist regime that suppressed religion. The city where she lives now is quite a contrast, home to an annual multicultural winter event called Festival of Festivals. “Now I live in Haifa, which is a city of three reli-gions, Judaism, Islam and Chris-tianity, and I go to a church with a priest who prays in Ukrainian, and no one bothers us,” she says.

Jaroslawa arrived in Israel in very dif-ferent circumstances than Hester. It was economics, not idealism, that brought her here. In 1969, a man she helped save, Avraham Shapiro, invited her to visit Israel. She met him after five decades, and to visit Yad Vashem, where she would receive a medal as a Righteous Among the Nations. She recalls: “When I was here people start-ed asking me about the economic situ-a tion back home, and it was very
Leonard Wilf, chairman of ASYV; Phil Blazer, founder and president of Jewish Life Television; Legacy Award recipient and producer of the Oscar-winning film Schindler’s List, Branko Lustig; Ron Meier, executive director of ASYV.

Presentation of Legacy Award to Holocaust survivor and Hollywood producer Meyer Gottlieb (center), by actor and family friend Tony Goldwyn (left) and Leonard Wilf, chairman of ASYV (right).

Ron Meier, executive director of ASYV (left) and Leonard Wilf, chairman of ASYV (right) with Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, real estate developer, and philanthropist, David Wiener.

Sheldon and Dr. Miriam Adelson, Yad Vashem Patrons of the Mount of Remembrance, at 2016 Salute to Hollywood Gala.

Fela and David, z”l, Shapell at the 2014 Salute to Hollywood Gala. Fela Shapell and Shapell family, Platinum Sponsors of the 2016 Gala, were in attendance at this year’s Gala.

Shaya Ben Yehudah, director of the International Relations Department at Yad Vashem, Rita Spiegel, daughter of ASYV founders Abraham and Edita Speigel, z”l, Gala Chairs Elissa and Edward Czuker.
PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ASYV ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON

This year’s sold-out Annual Spring Luncheon was held on May 18th at the Jewish Museum on 92nd Street. The event honored Jaci Paradis for her contributions to Holocaust remembrance and education and for her unwavering dedication to advancing our Young Leadership Associates. The guest speaker was Dr. Laura Barbanel, a psychologist, who spoke about teaching the Holocaust to your children. Jaci Paradis was presented with the American Society for Yad Vashem Achievement Award by Chairman Leonard Wilf and Executive Director Ron Meier. She was recognized for her ongoing commitment to Holocaust education and commemoration which are central to her family. Jaci plans to continue working with the American Society for Yad Vashem to reach out to third-generation families to work together on a plan to educate children about the Holocaust. “Making sure that the Holocaust remains important to my children is very important. They won’t have the benefit of speaking with survivors to hear the stories first hand. We need to develop a program that will help parents teach their children about the Holocaust in ways that will make it important and meaningful,” Jaci said.

The chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem, Leonard Wilf, reminded us of the importance of continuing to raise awareness in the next generation. “It is a wonderful thing to see so many members of the third generation joining us here today as we honor Jaci Paradis, an active member of our Young Leadership Associates. Jaci’s connection to Holocaust remembrance is deeply rooted. It is through dedicated people like her that I know the memories of the Holocaust will be passed on to the generations to come. “In her closing remarks, Luncheon Chair Danielle Karten reminded everyone of the importance of being involved in the American Society for Yad Vashem and in Holocaust remembrance. “We need to continue to recognize the survivors who are still among us,” said Danielle. “Holocaust remembrance has to be part of us all and we have to pass along the stories and memories to our children and they must be prepared to pass them along to their children.”

Three generations — Sara Bergman, Jaci Paradis and Miriam Bosso.

Ron Meier, executive director of the ASYV; Jaci Paradis, honoree; and Leonard Wilf, chairman of the ASYV.

Shelley Paradis, honoree Jaci Paradis, and Joseph Paradis.

Sharon Halpern, Jaci Paradis, David Halpern and Gladys Halpern.

Danielle Karten, Luncheon chair; and Harry Karten.

Daniella Pomeranc; YLA Chair Abbi Halpern; Jaci Paradis, Rachel Shimay and Jessica Mausk.
A WWII VACATION THAT SAVED TWO JEWISH BROTHERS’ LIVES

T wo Jewish brothers from Paris, Henri and André Herscovici, 11 and 9, respectively, were sent away for a vacation in the summer of 1942. The vacation wouldn’t only provide them with fresh air, as their mother wanted, but also save them from the Nazis.

In that same period, their mother and sisters were taken to the Drancy internment camp and then later to Auschwitz, where they would eventually be killed by the Nazis. While the Herscovici brothers were saved from the immediate Nazi threat, they truly owned their lives to Paul and Marthe Coche, the couple that ran the Santé de l’Enfance preventory, where the mother program was that they had attended.

The Coches’ institution for those with tuberculosis, at the Château de Beaurouvre in Blainelaville, was open to all those in need. The couple were defenders of the ideals of social equality, and alltogether housed almost 100 students from Paris in their preventorium.

In the summer of 1942, one of the Herscovici’s neighbors, a Mme. Roby, wrote to them, saying “A black time lies ahead for you. Under no circumstances should you return here.”

Seeing the Herscovici’s despair and helplessness (their father had joined the underground before the rest of the family was deported and would not be able to travel with his sons after the war), the Coches did everything they could to protect the young children and to protect them from being turned over to the Americans and their allies.

Along with Henri and André, the Coches helped hide another 15 or so Jewish children, along with another Jewish dormitory supervisor. The institution’s adjacent farms provided enough fresh supplies for all the children during the war, and none of the Jews faced any discrimination during the three years that they remained there under the Allies liberated France.

Paul Coche died in 1953, and Marthe in 1972, and it wasn’t until 1995 that Henri, who had made aliyah with his father and André on the Exodus 5707 in 1947, was discovered and approached by Marthe’s children.

Henri Herscovici testified on the Coches’ behalf, and Yad Vashem recognized Paul and Marthe Coche as Righteous Among the Nations on May 5, 2003.

DUTCH CHRISTIAN COUPLE HONORED FOR HOLOCAUST-ERA BRAVERY

Dutch Christian Zionists who died as a result of their unrelenting efforts to save Jews from the Holocaust were recognized by Israel as Righteous Among the Nations.

A medal attesting to the distinction, conferred by the Jewish state through the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum, was given by Israel’s ambassador to the Netherlands, Haim Divon, to Maya Schipper — a granddaughter of Johanna Engelberta Schipper-Kuiper, a native of Amsterdam.

In the summer of 1942, one of the Schippers, a child named Marthe, was sent to forced labor because of her Jewish family involvement in her rescue operation. Her family was deported and put on a death march to Flossenbürg. Two days later, he reached Pocking.

After finding Rabbi Meisels and tendencies to him, the hamantaschon appointed him the religious authority of the DP camp. “Pocking had been a forced labor camp. Many Jews who worked there were murdered, their bodies flung into a large mass grave,” said Griver. “My father decided to move them into a Jewish grave, based on lists he had with him. Little by little, he made sure that the non-Jews who perished were buried in a separate place, in a Christian ceremony conducted by a priest.”

Beyond his work with the deceased, Rabbi Meisels worked hard to rehabilitate Jewish spiritual life in the camp. He obtained affidavits and helped the She’erit HaPala’uta — the surviving remnant of Holocaust survivors — immigrate to Eretz Israel. “He aspired not to leave any Jew on German soil,” added Griver.

On Rabbi Meisels’ initiative, a memorial was established at Pocking for those murdered in the Holocaust. In 1947, when a march of the survivors from the Pocking camp took place, a ceremony was held to inaugurate the towering memorial, which bore the names of those murdered. Aside from survivors from the DP camp, the American soldiers who liberated the camp and a local official were also present. After the DP camp was closed, Rabbi Meisels offered a rabbinical position in Chicago. However, he declined “to remain in Exile,” and emigrated to Israel with his family in 1949.

R E N E W A L O F R E L I G I O U S L I F E I N T H E 
POCHING-WALDSTADT DP CAMP

T he Yad Vashem Archives currently house some 125,000 video, audio and written testimonies, all of which enrich our knowledge and understanding of Jewish life before, during and after the Shoah.

In 1945, Jewish-American soldier Sidney Chachmaister noticed a man lying prone on top of a mound of bodies at the Pocking concentration camp. The Coches’ behalf, and Yad Vashem in 2009 by Miriam Griver, who liberated the camp and a local official were also present. After the DP camp was closed, Rabbi Meisels offered a rabbinical position in Chicago. However, he declined “to remain in Exile,” and emigrated to Israel with his family in 1949.

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STORY OF HOW US SOLDIER SAVED 200 JEWS FINALLY TOLD

BY ARDEN DIER, NEWSWER

Oddie Edmonds is the first US solider to receive Israel’s Righteous Among the Nations honor, 70 years after he risked his life to save 200 Jews. The native of Knoxville, Tenn., was captured in the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944 and held at German POW camp Stalag IXA, according to the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum. When the Nazis ordered all Jewish-American POWs to step forward on January 27, 1945, Edmonds — the highest-ranking noncommissioned officer at the camp — ordered 1,000 US soldiers to do so, regardless of their religion, per the AP.

“They cannot all be Jewish!” a German commander said, per Yad Vashem.

“We are all Jews here,” Edmonds replied, adding soldiers didn’t need to divulge their religion under the Geneva Conventions. The command-er then put a gun to Edmonds’ head.

“He said, ‘I’ll give you one more chance. Have the Jewish men step forward or I will shoot you on the spot.’” Edmonds’ son, the Rev. Chris Edmonds, tells NPR. “They said my dad paused, and said, ‘If you shoot, you’ll have to shoot us all.’”

The commander yielded. Chris Edmonds believes his dad’s move saved 200 lives.

Edmonds died in 1985 and his untold story nearly died with him. How it surfaced is fasci-nating: Some time after his father’s death, Chris Edmonds read an article about Richard Nixon’s purchase of a townhouse from a man named Lester Tanner — who men-tioned that Edmonds saved his life.

The son then embarked on a quest to find Tanner. Edmonds was honored as only the fifth American to receive the Israeli honor.
I want to break the silence, to open up the wound,” Vanagaite told an audience recently in a bookshop in Vilnus, a city once dubbed the “Jerusalem of the North” for its vibrant Jewish life before the war. “A mature nation must know its history so it is not repeated,” the 61-year-old Jewish author said.

Two black-and-white photographs adorn the cover of her book: Jewish cyclist Isakas Nolikas who represented Lithuania in the 1924 and 1926 Olympics and perished in 1943, and Basil Norvaisa, a Lithuanian lieutenant who killed Jews. Among the emotionally wrenching testimony in the book, an elderly woman told Vanagaite: “Many people wanted to help Jewish children, but they were afraid. Not of the Germans, but of their own.”

Lithuania was home to a community of more than 200,000 Jews before World War II. But historians contend that around 195,000 perished at the hands of the Nazis and local collaborators under the 1941–44 German occupation, nearly the entire Jewish population.

Today there are around 3,000 Jews living in the EU and NATO member state of three million people.

A state-funded research center has identified 2,000 Lithuanians suspected of taking part in the Holocaust, either by killing Jews, by sending them to execution or by confiscating their wealth. The study is due to be released later this year.

At the recently released 900 Lithuanians hold the honorary title of “Righteous Among the Nations,” awarded by Israel to gentiles who risked their lives to save Jewish neighbors. Critics argue that Vanagaite, also a public relations guru, exploited the Holocaust to gain publicity and failed to provide any new historical information. But Zuroff, who has slammed Vilnus for being slow to prosecute suspected collaborators, insists that Vanagaite’s own soul-searching is valuable.

There is “a good chance that it will help Lithuanian society because it is written not in an academic way but in a journalistic way” that is more accessible to readers, Zuroff, who works at Nazi-hunting Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Jerusalem office, told AFP.

Respected Lithuanian author Sigitas Parukis was among the first to hit a raw nerve when he focused on the genocide in rural Lithuania with his novel Darkness and Partners (Tamsa ir Partneriai), earning him a local human rights award in 2012.

Film and theater directors have also focused on the Holocaust, notably the movie Ghetto by Audrius Juzenas. The Holocaust was either distorted or ignored in Lithuania under five decades of Soviet rule. An honest examination only began after it became the first republic to split from the USSR in 1990.

The Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in 1940 under Moscow’s secret pact with Nazi Germany, and later the Soviets deported over 170,000 Lithuanians to Siberia. Anti-Semitic propaganda blaming the Jews for Soviet terror became rife. Germany then drove out the Red Army when it invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Some Lithuanians hailed the Germans as liberators, hoping they would grant Lithuania a measure of sovereignty.

The Soviets returned in 1944, going on to deport and exile more than 275,000 Lithuanians, mostly to Siberia. Another 21,000 died in an anti-Soviet insurgency.

President Algirdas Brazauskas apologized for Lithuanian collaborators with the Nazis during his historic 1995 speech in Israel’s parlia-

Lithuania’s parliament passed a compensation package in 2011 for Jewish communal property seized by the Nazis and then kept by the Soviet regime. It marked a milestone for the Baltic state’s tiny Jewish community, but its leader says a great deal of work is still needed.

“There has been a tremendous amount of academic research about the Holocaust, but I think we lag behind in education,” Jewish community leader Faina Kukliansky told AFP.

“The history of Lithuanian Jews must become an integral part of Lithuania’s system of education.”

Best-selling author Ruta Vanagaite, and Soviet occupation of the country, at times they too were perpetrators of crimes, and their victims were Jews.

Best-selling author Ruta Vanagaite, who co-wrote Our People (Musliakai) with top Israeli Nazi hunter Efraim Zuroff, is the latest to spark difficult discussions.

Writing the book turned out to be deeply personal and painful when she discovered her grandfather had collaborated with Nazis by working for a commission compiling lists of Jews in 1941.

“Some 16 years later, at 89 years old, Sophie made aliya and joined her daughter,” Mizrachi said. “Mizrachi had tried to persuade her mother to move to Israel earlier, but Sophie had been reluctant to leave Sol. So how did Mizrachi persuade Sophie to move to Israel? I told her, ‘the Messiah doesn’t come to Fair Lawn, New Jersey.’”

One day, Mizrachi got a phone call from her brother in the States, who told her that Sol, who had been diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer, was not given much time to live. Sol’s wish was to be buried next to Eliezer, who died in 1982 and is buried on Har Hamenuchot in Jerusalem.

As Mizrachi absorbed the news while babysitting her grandchildren later that day, the assisted living facility phoned to say that Sophie was not doing well.

Mizrachi went to the home that night and slept in her mother’s room. The whole night, Sophie fought demons, trying to get out of bed and speaking Yiddish. Mizrachi says that Sophie struggled with the demons because “she felt that her brother was dying,” even though she’d been told nothing of his situation.

Over the next 24 hours, Sophie’s condition ranged from feverish and dehydrated to apparently fine, and a doctor placed her under observation that afternoon.

Mizrachi went home for Shabbat, where she received a phone call from her brother telling her that Sol had died. Sol’s body was to be shipped to Israel for burial, arriving on Monday at 1:30 p.m.

Mizrachi’s brother had not intended to accompany the body, but after Mizrachi let him know that Sophie was ailing, he decided to fly to Israel. As Mizrachi spent Saturday night with her mother, Sophie began to drift again into sleepless delirium. On Sunday afternoon, an ambulance was called for Sophie, whose condition had deteriorated.

When Mizrachi saw her mother, she realized that she was trying to hold off dying until Sol’s body arrived. Sophie died Sunday night, just after Sol’s body and her son had arrived in Israel. After the double burial for Sophie and Sol the next day, Mizrachi said, “She vowed to her parents that she would take care of her brother until the end, and she kept her vow.”
Sz- year-old Abraham Freiburg had fled with his mother and long entertained the notion that Täl — the Yiddish word for Daddy — was only missing, and that he would soon find him. But “never again” came too late, because Abraham’s father was no longer around to hold him. He pretended to be an occasional visitor, take him to the countryside. He pretended to be an occasional visitor, take him to the countryside. He pretended to be an occasional visitor, take him to the countryside. He pretended to be an occasional visitor, take him to the countryside.

Abraham was sent away to live like a farmer’s son on the countryside. He pretended to be an altar boy in a church to avoid being identified as a Jew with a yellow star. He hid for months in someone’s attic, speaking only through whispers. He was thrown into jail when he and his mother crossed the border to Hungary illegally.

The war ended, and little Abraham and his mother, Heline, had narrowly escaped death dozens of times. The rest of the family was not so lucky. Some, who lived in the ghetto, were shot when it was blown down. Some were rounded up in faraway places like Babi Yar and buried with screams still fresh in their throats. Some had number tattoos on their arms. Some were taken away to concentration camps in the name of yellow stars. Some were taken away to concentration camps in the name of yellow stars. Some were taken away to concentration camps in the name of yellow stars.

Abraham arrived in America and changed his name to Adi. His mother remarried, and his last name, Freiburg, changed to Eisenberg. He excelled in school, became fluent in English, and went to university. He received a PhD in chemistry from Princeton, and went on to become one of the top 100 most influential chemists in the world. His son’s Hebrew name is Eliezer. This Eliezer also sang in a lovely tone-deaf way to his daughter, me, whom he bore on his shoulders and took to synagogue. He also sang in a lovely tone-deaf way to his daughter, me, whom he bore on his shoulders and took to synagogue.

Yekaterina Movchan-Panchenko received an award honoring the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem in 2001.

There were no family secrets. There were no family secrets. There were no family secrets.

BY LEORA EISENBERG
THE ALGEMEINER

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the off-repeated notion that Jews went willingly to the slaughter during the Holocaust is completely unfounded, a Holocaust commemoration activist told The Algemeiner. “It’s just a number of statements which were recently uncovered by his organization detailing eyewitness accounts of Jews fighting back,” Daniels said. 

Daniels’ organization has “uncovered remarkable documentation that shows thousands of accounts of ‘ordinary witnesses’ throughout the Holocaust, which is working on cataloging, translating and publishing. 

Recently, Daniels and his team came across an old Communist-era document written in the late 1940s. The document turned out to be an eyewitness account from a Jewish male in his 20s of an emotional tale of survival from the Warsaw ghetto which happened almost 73 years ago to this very day,” Daniels said. Daniels shared the story publicly for the first time with The Algemeiner.

A group of Jewish boys blockaded themselves in a building inside the ghetto and were shooting at Nazis walking past. One of the little-known ways the Nazis would enter the buildings of the ghetto was by using a human shield, a Jew. One of the survivors told of the time that while blockaded inside the room, they suddenly heard a knock on the door. Sitting quietly, the boys heard the甜蜜 old voice of an elderly Jew man calmly call out to them in beautiful, poetic Yiddish: “My children, the time has come. I am knocking on this door asking for safe passage. Alas, behind me stands a group of Amalek (evil people). Shoot me and then kill them. Better I die by the bullet of Jewish heroes than by the bullet of evil.” The young men did just that. By giving his life, the old pious Jew saved those young Jews fighting, allowing them to live another day.

According to Daniels, “this story perhaps the most harrowing of accounts we have ever uncovered.”

Other remarkable testimony uncovered by From the Depths shows how many Jews worked to ensure that their last moments on earth would not be spent in vain. In one case, eyewitness accounts tell of maldrouned and downtrodden Jews getting off the trains at the Treblinka concentration camp after being told power, usually under the guise of “anti-Zionism.” In his 1971 study Anti-Semitism without Jews, Hungarian-born Austrian writer Paul Lendvai detailed the cynical ways that Communist governments incited their Jewish populations — and threats in lands almost entirely depleting of their Jewish populations — and how those conspiratorial hysterias would “be a better place.” Daniels related. “They realized that this would be their final stop and they fought back, taking sadly a full stand before they were murdered.”

In other cases, Jewish women refused to be stripped naked, paradox and often raped by their Nazi tormentors. Instead, they would attack the Nazis and, in some accounts, even kill the Nazi bastards before they were murdered themselves.”

“One of the questions I always heard growing up and which was actually asked in one of my first interviews in Poland over two years ago is, ‘Why didn’t the Jews put up more of a fight? Why did they go like sheep to the slaughter?’ After a few years of living the subject, speaking with survivors, saviors and eyewitnesses, I can unequivocally say that the Jews fought back,” Daniels said.

The uncovering of these and other stories of heroism and survival from By From the Depths highlights an important issue facing the future of Holocaust memorialization, Daniels said. “The same way we are losing survivors of the Holocaust, so too are eyewitnesses passing away at a rapid rate,” he said. “We have a handful of years left to interview and speak to these people before it is too late.”

Hitler Youth members overrunning Jews made to scrub the streets in Vienna, Austria, 1938.
AZNAVOUR’S FAMILY SAVED JEWS FROM NAZIS

Charles Aznavour’s family hid Jews in their home during the German occupation of Paris in World War II, French-Armenian singer reveals in his new book.

BY AVNER SHAPIRA, HAARETZ

“We knew the chains/I knew the wound/I knew the hate/I knew the fear/from one day to the next.”

So go the lyrics to one of Aznavour’s songs “J’ai Connu,” from his 50th studio album, released in 2011. The song, told from the perspective of a Jewish prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps, doesn’t describe the singer’s direct experiences during World War II. But Aznavour, who will celebrate his 92nd birthday later this month, did have some personal awareness of some of the horrors depicted in the song, as the son of refugees who survived the Armenian genocide and rebuilt their lives in Paris after losing most of their relatives.

Although Aznavour’s life has been extensively chronicled, up to now he has said very little about an especially traumatic chapter in his and his family’s life: their decision to shelter and save Jews, Armenian deserters and underground activists in their home during the German occupation of France during the war, and their involvement in anti-Nazi activity.

Now Aznavour has decided to tell the whole story. In Hebrew, in a self-published book, Matzilim (Tzadikim) VeLohamim (Righteous Saviors and Fightingers), by genocide researcher Prof. Yair Auron. The latter spoke at length with Aznavour and his sister, Aida Aznavour-Garvarentz, who told him about their and their father’s survival through the German occupation and what led their family, especially their father, to take part in rescue missions despite the many risks. The book, which will also be translated into French and Armenian, recounts a specific case, but offers a moral lesson on human behavior under conditions of widespread terror, and political and ideological violence. Above all, it is the humane and heroic chapter in his and their family’s history.

A portrait photograph of the Aznavour family in the 1920s. Charles’ father, Mischa (center), is next to his wife, Aida. 

Aznavour says he knew many Jews when he was a child in Paris. “We grew up together in the Le Marais district, where many refugees and immigrants — including many Jews and Armenians — lived in the period between the two world wars. My father’s stall in the market was next to the stalls of some Jewish vendors.”

“Armenian peddlers, including my father, looked after the stalls of the Jews after they were arrested in the mass deportation of Parisian Jews ["the roundup"] in July 1942. So taking in and hiding Jews in our home during the war was a very natural thing for us to do: they were our neighbors and friends,” he adds. “We had a life together. We were there for them and they were there for us.”

In his three previous autobiographical works, Aznavour made very little mention of these acts of salvation. He told Auron he didn’t think they were so special and didn’t want to be perceived as moderate. But the professor convinced him of the importance of telling the story. Now the singer says, “I’m very proud of my family’s story and the beautiful, noble humanity of the act of rescue. Nothing makes me happier than to think that my dear parents saved people’s lives.”

A portrait photograph of the Aznavour family in the 1920s, Charles’ father, Mischa (center), is next to his wife, Aida.

BURNING THE UNIFORMS

A znavour was born in Paris on May 22, 1924, not long after his parents first arrived there. His father, Mischa Aznavourian, was born in Georgia in 1895 and lost his entire family in the Armenian genocide. His mother, Knar Baghdasaryan, was born in Izmir in 1904, and only she and her grandmother out of her entire family survived the genocide.

The couple fled Turkey on an Italian ship that brought them to Thessaaroniki, Greece, where their eldest daughter, Aida, was born in 1923.

The family had many Armenian friends in Paris, among them a couple named Meline and Missak Manouchian. The latter was the military commander of the underground group known as L’Affiche Rouge (The Red Poster), which was the first to carry out armed resistance actions against the Nazis. Aznavour’s family aided the group on many occasions and also hid the Manouchians for several months while they were being hunted by the French police and Gestapo.

The first time the family hid someone during World War II was when a friend of Aznavour’s father brought his brother to them — a Romanian Jew who lived in Germany, was accused of subversion and was sentenced to death. He had managed to escape to France disguised as a German soldier, and he knew that the Gestapo was after him. He found refuge in the family’s three-room apartment at 22 rue de Navarin, in Paris’ ninth arrondissement. At the start of the war, Aida recounts in the book, “We understood that the Jews were going to be the victims of brutality. We looked upon the Jews with sadness and sorrow. We knew what genocide was.” She says her parents showed no hesitation in taking in the Jewish refugee, “even though it was clear that if the Nazis found this man in our house, they’d kill us right away. We told him that our home was his home, and we treated him warmly, like a good friend who had to extend his stay. For a few days, he even slept in the same bed as Charles.”

SHELTERING 11 REFUGEES AT A TIME

The two Aznavour children, who were 16 and 17 at the start of the German occupation in 1940, pitched in to help, not knowing then that they would go on offering shelter to strangers. But then a woman came to the family, asking them to hide her Jewish husband, whose name was Simon. He had escaped from the Drancy internment camp, where the Jews of Paris were sent before being sent to the concentration camps outside of France.

For a while, the family also sheltered another Jew, and later on their apartment also served as a hideout for Armenians who’d deserted after being forcibly drafted into the German army. 

A portrait photograph of the Aznavour family in the 1920s. Charles’ father, Mischa (center), is next to his wife, Aida.

As the war dragged on, Aznavour says he and his sister became more and more aware of the political significance of hiding wanted people in your family home? How aware of the danger were you?

Aznovur: “My parents knew the danger was there every day, but my sister and I only grasped it later. We were ‘crazy’ young people. We were living our own lives and we followed in our parents’ footsteps. Only after the war did we realize how great the risk really was.”

Auron dedicates a large part of his book to the activities of L’Affiche Rouge — whose story is barely known in France, but had significant Jewish participation in it.

The group, which was associated with the French Communist Party and whose members were mostly immigrants without French citizenship, was active in 1942–1943 as part of the French Resistance, and carried out armed attacks against the French police and Gestapo, inflicting casualties among the Germans.

It was named after the red propaganda poster the authorities distributed against it, which included photographs of 10 members who were apprehended.

The group had about 200 members; 67 were arrested, including 34 Jews and three Armenians. Of the 23 who were sentenced to death, 12 were Jews and two Armenians, including Missak Manouchian.

When Manouchian was arrested, his wife found refuge with her friends the Aznavours, after other friends refused to take in children. Aznavour says his parents’ close friendship with the Manouchians was part of the special kinship shared by Armenian survivors. He has vivid memories of the couple from his childhood — “Missak taught me to play chess,” he recalls.

He says that although his parents didn’t officially belong to the Resistance, they aided much of the underground’s activity. His mother helped a group transport weapons that were hidden in a baby carriage.

When Manouchian was arrested, he sent a postcard to Aznavour’s mother, informing her son would bring honor to the Armenian people and glory to France. His words helped reassure his mother and planted hope for her son’s future success.

Auron says there were many other Armenian families, like the Aznavour family, who saved Jews during the Holocaust. Twenty-four of them have been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations, but there were even more.
WHEN POLAND EYED MADAGASCAR AS A FUTURE HOMELAND FOR JEWS

(Continued from page 4)

The Foreign Ministry. He was also the head of its emigration office, charged with assisting the expanding Jewish population. Poland’s official position was that European maritime empires should either permit Poland access to resources in their overseas colonies or allow Polish citizens to migrate to such places. This analysis had a force that went beyond Jewish policy. At a time when rural unemployment exceeded 50 per cent, Warsaw was urging the right of all of its citizens to emigrate. In the case of Jews, Polish diplomats pointed to the dramatic consequences of frozen migration routes. Before the First World War, roughly 150,000 Jews left Europe each year; in the 1930s the figure was a small fraction of this. In “trying to fool history,” as the history of the eastern colonies had “in mind the Jews first of all.”

T he question of the settlement of European Jews was a general one, in which Poland occupied a position somewhere between the Nazi one (“Jews may be eliminated, and emigration seemed the practical way to achieve this”) and the Zionist one (Jews had a right to a state, which would have to be created from an existing colony). The question of where European Jews might settle had been open since at least the 19th century, and very different sorts of politicians and ideologues proposed the same places. The island of Madagascar, a colonial French possession off the southeast African coast in the Indian Ocean, was introduced to the discussion by the French General Charles de La Garde Lagardère (actually a German named Boetticher) in 1885. This idea could be considered with greater or lesser hostility or sympathy. It had supporters in Great Britain and, of course, among Germans, including the Nazi leadership. Beck and Drymmer expressed a special interest in the future of Palestine, a former Ottoman possession that was under British authority. The decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire had been a lesson for many European statesmen. Whereas Hitler tended to see the creation of Balkan nation-states from the Ottoman Empire as a positive example of militarism, Poles understood the same history as national liberation that would spread from Europe to Asia. Whereas European territories taken from empires after the First World War generally became nation-states, Asian territories tended to become part of the French or British empires, sometimes in the form of “mandates” from the League of Nations. These were places judged not ready for sovereignty, and thus allotted to the great powers for political tutelage. Palestine, taken from the defunct Ottoman district of South Syria, was such a mandate. Although the territory had a rather small Jewish minority when the British took control in 1920, British policy presented Palestine as a future Jewish National Home. This was in line with the hopes of Zionists, who hoped that one day a deal for full statehood could be struck. This optimism was based on all of the powers to clarify their position on the future of Palestine. About 130,000 German Jews emigrated in the years after Hitler came to power, some 50,000 of them settling in Palestine. Their arrival reduced the demographic advantage of local Arabs, who tended to consider Palestine as part of some larger Arab homeland. Thinking that a continuation of Jewish immigration could lead to the success of Zionism, Arab leaders organized political action: first riots in April 1936, then the formation of strike committees and a general strike that lasted through October. This meant that 1937 was the moment of truth for the European states with a declared interest in the future of Palestine: Great Britain, Nazi Germany and Poland. London at first reacted to the Arab disturbances with a proposal for the partition of Palestine. When this led to further political chaos, the British reacted against migration to a quota. As the world was seen from London, Palestine was only a tiny part of the vast Arab and Muslim territories of the British Empire. Pleading Jews over Palestine could mean alienating Muslims throughout the Near East and southern Asia.

Berlin specified in 1937 its own attitude toward Zionism and a possible State of Israel. Palestine had appealed to the Nazi regime as a place where Jews could settle so long as this had no clear political implications for the Near East. But in spring 1937 the German local government in Jerusalem was concerned lest the creation of a State of Israel from Palestine weaken Germany’s position in the world. The German foreign minister circulated the official position to all embassies and consulates that Jewish settlement in Palestine was to be opposed, as a State of Israel would become a node in the world Jewish conspiracy. The Polish position differed from both the British and the German. London favored Jewish statehood at some distant and undefined place but opposed much further Jewish migration for the time being. Berlin opposed Jewish statehood, but wanted Jews to leave Germany as soon as possible for some distant and undefined place. Warsaw wanted both massive emigration of Jews from Europe and a Jewish state in Palestine. In public the Polish foreign minister and other diplomats called upon the British to ease immigration restrictions and create a Jewish National Home as soon as possible. The Poles had very specific ideas of what such an entity should be: “A Jewish, independent Palestine, as large as possible, with access to the Red Sea.” This meant equal rights for the Arab population. In private, Polish diplomats even raised with British colleagues the issue of the Sinai Peninsula, in Egypt. In 1937, the Polish armed forces began to offer arms and training to the Haganah, the main Zionist self-defense force in Palestine.

The offices of Nazi newspaper Der Stürmer in Galôns, circa 1935. An anti-Semitic poster in the window reads “Die Juden sind unser Unglück!” (“The Jews are our misfortune.”)

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The Shoa memorial in Paris, which lists the 76,000 Jews deported from France during the Holocaust.

FRANCE TO PAY INTO COMPE NSATION FUND FOR US VICTIMS OF HOLOC AUST

F rance is to pay $60 million to mainly American victims of the Holocaust who were transported by train from France to Nazi death camps during the Second World War.

The two countries issued a joint statement announcing the coming into force of a compensation agreement drafted in December 2014 after years of legal wrangling. The settlement creates a fund to compensate thousands of non-French citizens, their spouses or descendants who were not covered by a settlement program that France put in place in 1946. “The United States will administer and distribute this amount to eligible Americans, Israelis and other foreign and their families who were not entitled to make claims under the existing French program,” the statement by the State Department and the Foreign Ministry said.

“In turn, the United States will ensure an enduring legal peace for France with regard to Holocaust deportation claims in the United States,” it said, alluding to lawsuits brought in the US against the French state rail company SNCF.

Requisitioned by the Nazi regime in Germany, SNCF trains transported 76,000 Jews across France to the death camps from 1942 to 1944. About 3,000 survived, according to the rail company.

Lawsuits brought in US courts nearly cost SNCF its commercial contracts in the United States. There have been calls for SNCF itself to compensate US victims. But the French foreign ministry argued in December that the SNCF was an instrument of the deportation but had never been held responsible. “It is the responsibility of French authorities to assume the consequences,” it said, noting that SNCF was not part of the negotiations that led to the compensation agreement.
SWISS UNDER PRESSURE OVER ART THAT JEWISHS WERE FORCED TO SELL

BY CATHERINE HICKLEY, THE ART NEWSPAPER

P ressure is growing on Swiss museums to accept that works of art sold by Jewish refugees to help them escape from the Nazis were forced sales, and that the works should therefore be returned to their heirs. Speaking in Zurich last month, Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, proposed a plan of action, which he described as “long overdue.”

Lauder said he had turned his atten- tion to Switzerland after Cornelius Gurlitt bequeathed his entire collec- tion — some of which had been loot- ed from Jews by the Nazis — to the Bern Kunstmuseum. The museum has said it will refuse to accept any Gurlitt works with tainted or unclear provenance, and that they will remain in Germany for further research. Whereas the German government has pledged to return any art in Gurlitt’s hoard that had been “lost due to Nazi persecution,” Swiss museums have traditionally rejected claims for what they term fluchtgut (flight assets) — art sold by Jewish refugees to fund their escape or to start new lives after losing the rest of their possessions, their homes and their livelihoods under the Nazis.

One of Lauder’s demands was that Switzerland treat fluchtgut claims in the same way as claims for looted art. “Could it possibly make any differ- ence if the painting was taken off the wall by a Nazi or if its Jewish owner was forced to sell that same painting to one of Hitler’s art dealers for almost nothing?” he asked in his speech at Zurich’s Kunstmuseum. The argument has simmered for decades. The heirs of the Jewish art historian Curt Glaser, for instance, approached the Kunsthands about a fluchtgut painting in its collection in the 1960s. Suspended from his job and evicted from his Berlin apartment, Glaser had escaped Nazi Germany in 1933 for Switzerland. After the Second World War broke out, he pleaded with the Kunsthands director to rescue an Edvard Munch painting still in Berlin by purchasing it. Glaser wrote saying he would view any offer “from a different perspective than before the war.” The painting, Music on Karl Johan Street (1889), still hangs in the Kunsthau. Glaser sold it “for a ridicu- lously low price,” says David Rowland, the New York–based lawyer who represents Glaser’s heirs. “And, of course, he used the funds to flee Europe. The problem has been that the Swiss have been unwilling to recognize fluchtgut cases.

The Swiss culture minister Isabelle Chotot pointed out last year that the country is the only one to draw a dis- tinction between fluchtgut and art lost due to Nazi persecution, and called for the latter term to be applied. Many in the Swiss museum community and art trade oppose that.

“Fluchtgut cannot be treated the same way as art that was sold in Germany and Austria,” says Marc Fehlmann, the head of collections at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin and the former director of the Oskar Reinhart Museum in Winterthur, Switzerland. “The Jewish refugees who sold art in Switzerland had full access to the proceeds, and Switzerland was a free country. Why isn’t Ronald Lauder talking about the art that was sold by refugees in the US and the UK?”

A fluchtgut case has, in fact, arisen in the UK. In March 2012, the Spoliation Advisory Panel issued a recommendation on a claim for 14 watches and clocks at the British Museum that a Jewish refugee had sold at Christie’s in London in 1939. Though the panel found the condi- tions of the sale met the minimum requirements for a forced sale, it said the price was not under value and that the moral strength of the claim was insufficient to warrant restitution or compensation. Even though the UK fluchtgut claim was ultimately rejected by the court, the claimants could appeal to an independ- ent panel in Britain: in Switzerland, no such body exists. Another of Lauder’s demands is that Switzerland establish such a commission.

(each case has to be looked at indi- vidually," says Olaf Ossmann, a Swiss lawyer who specializes in Nazi- looted art. "Was the sale voluntary? Would it have happened without the Nazi regime? Did the seller get the money? Did he get a fair price?)

A bequest to the American Society for Yad Vashem helps keep the memory of the Six Million alive... Please remember us in your trust, will, estate plan or with the planned gift. It’s your legacy... to your family, and your people. For more information, or for help with proper wording for the bequest to ASYV, please contact Jonathan Gudema at 212-220-4304