

Days of Remembrance

April 15-22, 2012

**Choosing to Act:
Stories of Rescue**

Days of Remembrance

In 1933, nine million Jews lived in the countries of Europe that would be occupied by Nazi Germany during the war.

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The Holocaust was the systematic persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

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The Nazis also targeted:
Roma/Sinti or Gypsies, Black
people, those with mental and
physical disabilities, and Slavic
people including Poles and
Russians.

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Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

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Holocaust is a word of Greek origin meaning “sacrifice by fire.”

The Nazis believed they were “racially superior” and that Jews and others were a threat to the “German racial community.”

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By 1945, six million Jews were murdered during the Nazi genocide. This included two million children under the age of 15.



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

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In all, 11 million people from these groups



died in the Holocaust.

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Notice stating that hiding
Jews was a crime



Jews in hiding – and their protectors – risked severe punishment if captured because such activities were deemed capital offenses.

Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

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This week is set aside to remember not only the victims of the Holocaust, but also the heroes.



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

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The victims had no control or choice in their destiny.



Two German Jewish families at a gathering before the war.
Only two people in this group survived the Holocaust.

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The rescuers, on the other hand, made *choices*. They *chose* to risk their own lives, their families' lives, and their homes to help save thousands of innocents.

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The 2012 Days of Remembrance commemorate the actions and stories of ordinary people who through their actions became extraordinary. They chose to intervene and help rescue those being persecuted by the Nazis.

Days of Remembrance

Father Czeslaw Baran — Franciscan Monk



Photo courtesy of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

During the Holocaust, priests, nuns, and monks rescued Jews by hiding them in more than 900 church institutions across Poland, the only German-occupied country in which assistance to Jews was routinely punished by death.

Father Baran and his fellow monks worked with the Sisters of Mary to hide Jewish children in a convent school near Warsaw where he taught. After liberation, all the children were returned to the surviving Jewish community.

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Paul Grueninger — A Police Commander

In 1938, Captain Grueninger, commander of the Swiss Border Police, chose to disregard orders to close the borders to Jewish refugees. He ignored fake visas, and backdated entry visas to prevent the expulsion of recent Jewish refugees.

He was terminated for defying orders, and was convicted by a Swiss court for falsifying official documents.

Grueninger's actions saved between 2,000 and 4,000 Jews.



Photo courtesy of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Marie-Josephe Dincq — Homemaker

The sister of a Belgian priest, Dincq cared for seven-month-old Marguerite-Rose Birnbaum when it became too dangerous for her to remain with her parents, who were hiding in the priest's abbey.



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

Her husband, Pierre, was a member of the resistance until his deportation to Dachau, where he was killed. Even after her husband's arrest, Marie-Josephe and her children continued to shelter Marguerite-Rose. In the summer of 1945, they returned her to her father.

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Leopold Socha — Sanitation Worker

Socha discovered Jews crawling through the city sewers to escape the liquidation of the Lwow ghetto. Using his knowledge of the sewer systems, he found hiding places and, with his wife and a co-worker, brought food and news from the outside.

Socha initially received money for his efforts, but chose to continue to help after the payments stopped. Ten of the twenty-one people he helped in the sewers survived.



Photo courtesy of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Father Henri Reynders “Father Bruno”

After his release from a POW camp, Father Bruno established himself at a monastery near Louvain. When the deportation of Jews began in Belgium, he, in union with Le Comité de Défense des Juifs, organized an underground operation to shelter Jewish children.



Photo courtesy of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

He provided the children with ration cards and false identification papers, and arranged financial support for their host families. After the liberation, he helped reunite the children with surviving parents.

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Tatyana and Ania Kontsevich — Homemaker and Daughter



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

During two days in September 1941, the Nazis and local collaborators murdered 33,000 Jews in a ravine outside the Ukrainian capital. Some Jews, however, found shelter and protection with their neighbors.

Kontsevich and her ten-year-old daughter Ania sheltered the Redlich family in their attic.

While home alone, Ania dissuaded German soldiers from climbing into the attic, where the Redlich family would have been discovered.

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Tadeusz Strelczyk — Laborer



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

When Pola Kaplan was three-years-old, her mother arranged for her to be smuggled out of the ghetto in Poland by a Jewish electrician. He took her to the home of his brother-in-law, Tadeusz Strelczyk and his wife Madzia Jozefowicz.

In 1941, Tadeusz was sent to a labor camp. He returned 22 months later and took his wife and Pola to the village of Kowale, where he told neighbors that Pola had tuberculosis and needed fresh country air.

Neither of Pola's parents survived the war, so she remained with Tadeusz and Madzia until 1967.

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Juliette Usach — Children's Home Director



Born in Spain, Usach fled the civil war there and became the director of the La Guespy children's home in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France.

Heeding the preaching of their pastors, she and other residents gave aid to the persecuted. Jewish refugees were hidden and supplied with false identification papers, birth certificates, and ration cards. Groups of Jews also were taken at night across the border into Switzerland.

Photo courtesy of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

It is estimated that 5,000 refugees, including 3,500 Jews, were saved by the people of Le Chambon and the surrounding region.

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Marion Pritchard — Social Worker



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

After witnessing a deportation at a children's home, Pritchard decided to devote herself to rescue work. Among the many Jews she sheltered were Freddie Polak and his three children.

One night in 1943, after a police raid on the house, she shot and killed a policeman when the children were not in hiding to keep him from turning them in. Neighbors helped her remove the body.

After liberation, she worked as a social worker for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to help reunite parents and children.

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Refik Veseli — Student



Photo courtesy of The United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

After Yugoslavia was invaded, Moshe Mandil and his family fled into Albania. There he met Refik Veseli, a 16-year-old student and photography apprentice, who took the Mandils to his parents' house in the Muslim village of Krujë.

Mandil's children lived openly as Muslim villagers while he and his wife hid in a small room in the Veselis' barn. They survived the bombing of the village and intensive searches of the area.

After the war, the Mandils returned to Yugoslavia and reopened their photography shop. Refik lived with them and continued his apprenticeship.

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Today these individuals are considered heroes, but many rescuers did not see themselves this way.

The villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon refused to accept praise. *“How can you call us good?”* one villager asked. *“We did what had to be done.”*

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The motivation of rescuers varied widely, from opposition to Nazi racial ideology, to compassion, to religious or moral principles.

Some even had anti-Semitic prejudices, but still chose to rescue Jews.

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“In their uniqueness, stories of rescue remind us all of the wide range of choices that we are capable of making as individuals. Our actions in the face of injustice of hatred always matter.”

— The United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum

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*“One person of integrity can make
a difference.”*

— Elie Wiesel



Photo courtesy of
The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity

Works Cited

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