

CH. 6: RESCUERS

IN

THE HOLOCAUST

A NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER'S RESOURCE

FEATURING THE NARRATIVES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
WHO BECAME NORTH CAROLINA RESIDENTS

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North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

VI ■ RESCUERS ■

OVERVIEW

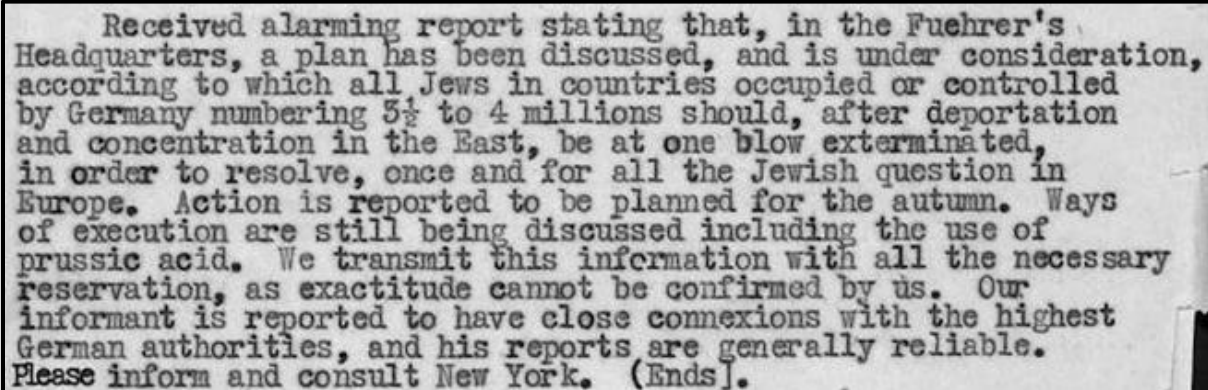
- *"Our decision to save the Lederman family was entirely spontaneous. We couldn't stand by and not offer help."* —Bogdan Zal
- *"I have often wondered how the Palaschuk family had such strength and bravery to do what they did. To hide us—four people—when they knew that the punishment would be death for them and their children, and all their property would be confiscated. I am not sure how I would react in the same situation. I don't think that many of us would know how we would react."* —Shelly Weiner

For the most part, the nations of the world offered little assistance to the victims of the Holocaust before and during the war. German plans for the annihilation of the Jews could not have succeeded without the active cooperation of non-Germans in occupied Europe. A long tradition of anti-Semitism aided the Nazis in their efforts. Many of the death camps were staffed by eastern Europeans, recruited and trained by the Nazis. Yet amidst this environment many individuals took great risks to aid and rescue Jews and other Nazi victims.

NATIONS OFFER LITTLE HELP AS NAZI PERSECUTION BEGINS During the early years of the Nazi regime, few countries offered refuge to its victims, even after it became clear that discrimination against Jews and other groups was a deliberate policy of the German government. Although its charter forbade such actions, the League of Nations remained helpless to stop Hitler's plans for the forced expulsion of the Jews. The League did set up a commission to help German Jewish refugees, but member nations offered so little assistance that the head of the commission, James McDonald, resigned in protest in 1935. No nation offered to revise its immigration policy to meet this crisis. None except England offered to accept Jews in large numbers while they could still get out in the 1930s; many were Jewish children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia who were saved through the Kindertransport program.

NATIONS KEEP IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONS The countries of the world continued to restrict immigration from Europe. In the 1930s government officials in the United States and Great Britain as well as others outside Nazi Europe received numerous press reports about the persecution of Jews, and by August 1942 they had confirmed reports of Hitler's intent to annihilate European Jewry. However, various factors including anti-Semitism, the Great

National Archives UK



Received alarming report stating that, in the Fuehrer's Headquarters, a plan has been discussed, and is under consideration, according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 5½ to 4 millions should, after deportation and concentration in the East, be at one blow exterminated, in order to resolve, once and for all the Jewish question in Europe. Action is reported to be planned for the autumn. Ways of execution are still being discussed including the use of prussic acid. We transmit this information with all the necessary reservation, as exactitude cannot be confirmed by us. Our informant is reported to have close connexions with the highest German authorities, and his reports are generally reliable. Please inform and consult New York. (Ends].

"All Jews . . . should . . . be at one blow exterminated"

Portion of the telegram sent by Gerhard Riegner, secretary of the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland, to its New York and London offices on August 8, 1942, confirming reports that the Nazis intended to exterminate the Jews in Germany and the occupied nations.

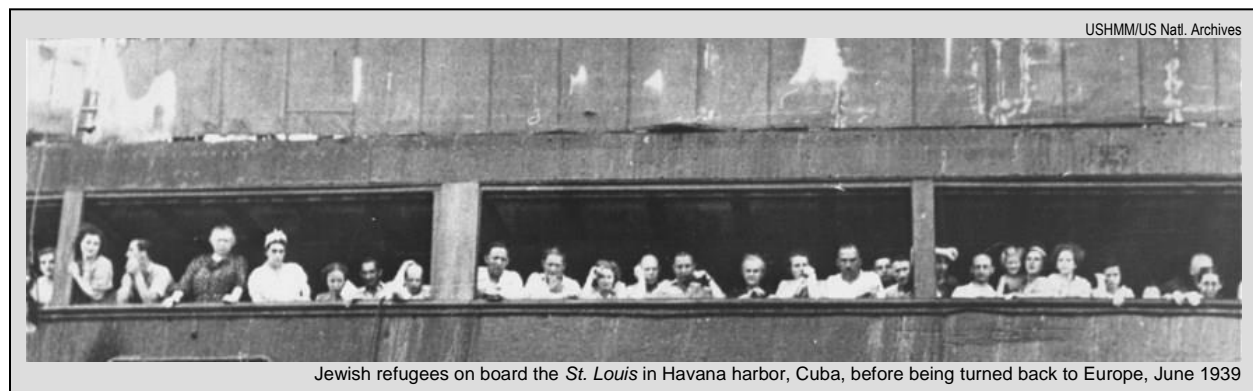
Depression, and fear of a massive influx of refugees stopped both countries from changing their immigration and refugee policies. During the Nazi regime (1933-45), the United States admitted about 200,000 refugees from Nazi-controlled Europe, yet nearly 200,000 openings went unfilled. Once the war began for the U.S. in 1941, immigration from war-torn Europe to the U.S. basically stopped. Great Britain, Canada, and a number of Latin American countries had policies similar to those of the United States. During the war, the Allies' stated goal of defeating Germany's military took precedence over rescue efforts. U.S. leaders did not take specific steps to stop or slow the murder of Jews until 1944 when mounting pressure from the public, particularly from Jewish-American groups, led the U.S. to undertake limited rescue efforts.

KINDERTRANSPORT After the Nazi attacks on Jews in November 1938 (Kristallnacht), Great Britain offered refuge to thousands of children in Germany and Nazi-occupied regions. Through the Kindertransport program from 1938-1940, 9,000-10,000 children under 17 (7500 of them Jewish) left their homes, most never to see their parents again, and traveled to Britain where they lived with families or in children's facilities.



A Jewish girl wearing an ID tag sits after arriving in England with the second Kindertransport, December 1938.

ST. LOUIS REFUSED ENTRY While the doors to official emigration were closing to German Jews, many still tried to leave for a safe haven abroad. In May 1939, 937 German Jews boarded the M.S. *St. Louis* bound from Germany to the United States. The passengers already had American quota permits but did not yet have visas. After the *St. Louis* reached Cuba, the passengers waited for over a month for their papers to be processed by American authorities. When permission was eventually denied by the U.S., several Jewish organizations arranged for the refugees to settle in Great Britain, France, Belgium, or the Netherlands. While many died in Nazi camps, most of the *St. Louis* refugees survived the war.



Jewish refugees on board the *St. Louis* in Havana harbor, Cuba, before being turned back to Europe, June 1939

LITTLE SUPPORT FROM CHURCH LEADERS BEFORE THE WAR The world's religious communities did little to protest the mistreatment of Germany's Jews. Before the war, few Catholic and Protestant clergymen officially condemned the Nazi treatment of Jews. Church leaders in Germany looked aside when in 1935 the Nazis implemented the Nuremberg Laws. After war broke out, however, a number of Catholic and Protestant leaders did offer assistance to Jews, including false baptismal certificates and refuge in monasteries and convents. In Germany, Pastor Martin Niemöller, a World War I hero, spoke out against some Nazi policies, as did a few other high-ranking German religious leaders. But such protest was limited and came too late to make a difference.

Many church organizations gave critical assistance to Jewish and non-Jewish refugees in Europe; for example, the Society of Friends (Quakers) gave aid to thousands of Jewish refugees in internment camps in southern France and arranged for many of their children to emigrate to the United States. After the war, the American Friends Service Committee and the British Friends Service Council were awarded the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize, particularly for their relief work in Europe during and after the war.

DENMARK Even after it was occupied by the Germans in 1940, the Danish government refused to accept Nazi racial policies. The Danish king told German officials that he would not permit the resettlement of Denmark's small Jewish population. In fall 1943, when the Nazis ordered the deportation of the Danish Jews, the Danish Resistance, with the strong support of the local population, organized a boatlift to neutral Sweden. Danish fishermen and police risked their lives, ferrying Jews across the Baltic Sea to Sweden. The two-week rescue saved 7,200 Jews (and 680 of their non-Jewish relatives), almost the entire Danish Jewish community.

ITALY AND BULGARIA Although Italy and Bulgaria were allied with Germany in the war, both nations resisted German orders to deport Jewish citizens and slowed efforts to deport Jews. Despite severe German pressure and local anti-Semitic political parties, Bulgaria did not deport its Jewish citizens (but did allow deportations from areas newly annexed to Bulgaria).

POLAND In Poland the Nazis made helping Jews an offense punishable by death. The names of those executed were widely publicized, and punishments often applied to the rescuers' families as well as the rescuers themselves. Despite this, many Polish citizens aided Jews during the war. Hundreds of Polish Catholics hid Jews in their homes and farms. A few resistance groups supplied arms to Jewish fighters in Polish ghettos. Żegota, a small underground organization of Polish Catholics, hid Jews from deportation. Older Jews in hiding were given money and medicine. An estimated 4,000 Jewish children were taken from the ghettos and put into Catholic orphanages, convents, or cloisters where they assumed new identities and survived the war.

OSCAR SCHINDLER The efforts of businessman and Nazi Party member Oscar Schindler to save Jewish lives became world known with the 1993 film *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg. Even though Nazi authorities suspected him of protecting Jews, Schindler continued to insist that he needed the forced laborers in his factories, thereby saving over 1,000 Jews from death in Auschwitz.

FRENCH AND DUTCH TOWNS HIDE JEWS The small town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a community of Protestant Huguenots in southern France, saved between 3,000 and 5,000 Jews. Urged to act by the local pastor of the Reformed Church, André Trocmé, townspeople hid thousands of Jews in their homes and farmhouses. From there many were smuggled across the border into Switzerland. The Dutch village of Nieuwlande performed a similar act of heroism. Beginning in 1942, each resident agreed to hide one



USHMM/Leopold Page Photographic Collection
Oscar Schindler (second from right) in Munich one year after the war with a group of Jews he rescued, spring 1946



Juliet Usach (arms folded), director of La Guespy children's home in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, with Jewish children living in the home, ca. 1941

Jewish family or at least one Jew. By sharing the danger equally, no one villager risked being denounced by the others.

ANNE FRANK Perhaps the most famous hidden person during the Holocaust is Anne Frank, who with her family and others remained in hiding for almost two years in a secret section of the building which housed her father's business. Only four employees knew of their hiding and helped the families survive until their arrest.

HIDDEN CHILDREN It is estimated that only 6-11% of the prewar population of Jewish children in Europe survived the war, and many of these were sent into hiding with Christian families or organizations by their parents. Despite vast efforts by the United Nations and other organizations to reunite families after the war, the obstacles in chaotic war-torn Europe were immense, and, tragically, few parents of hidden children were still alive. (See the Lesson "Hidden Children" in this guide.)

DIPLOMATS IN NAZI-HELD NATIONS HELP JEWS ESCAPE

Many know the name of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat in Budapest, Hungary, who gave Swedish "certificates of protection" to thousands of Hungarian Jews, often handing out these documents to people loaded on German trains bound for the death camps. Wallenberg and other diplomats in Budapest from neutral nations, including Carl Lutz (Switzerland) and Sampaio Garrido (Portugal), saved tens of thousands of lives through their bravery. Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat in Lithuania, gave hundreds of Jews visas to travel through Japan to the island of Curaçao, a Dutch island in the Caribbean where they had permission to travel. George Mantello, a Jewish diplomat working for the consulate of El Salvador in Switzerland, gave fake Salvadoran citizenship papers to thousands of Jews.

WHO WERE THE RESCUERS? There are many other instances of individuals acting with exemplary selflessness to rescue Jews and other victims from the fate of death to which Nazism had condemned them. Their acts range from smuggling food through a ghetto wall to hiding a family in an attic or barn to providing thousands of desperate Jews with exit visas. Who were they? Why did they act when many did not? For many, the explanation is a commitment to doing what is right, regardless of the consequences. Many rescuers insist that they were not particularly courageous, that anyone in the same situation would have done the same. We who learn of their acts hope this is the truth.

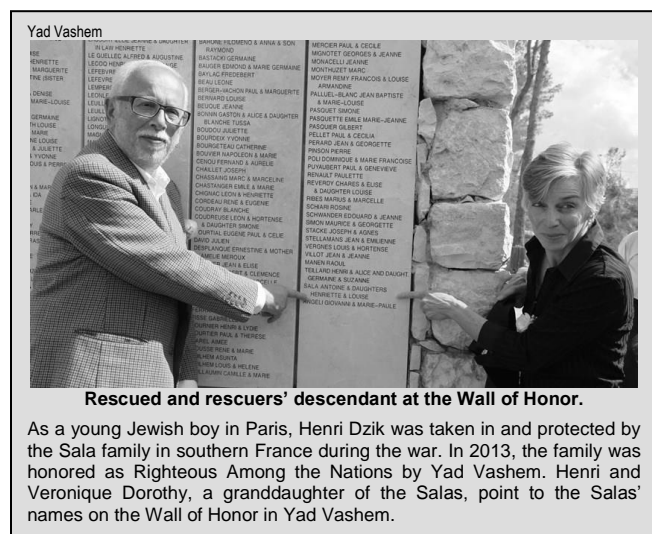


Rescuers featured in this guide (from top):

- **Johannes & Maria van den Brink**, rescuers of Renee Fink
- **Natalia & Nikinor Palaschuk**, rescuers of Shelly Weiner and Rachel Kizhnerman
- **Simone Weil Lipman** (right) and a colleague, rescuers of Jewish children in France
- **Bogdan Zal** and fellow rescuers of Esther & Ezjel Lederman.

In addition to personal integrity and courage, several factors of place and circumstance influenced the opportunity for rescue:

- ♦ The degree of control that the Nazis exercised over an occupied country often reflected their attitude toward the country's inhabitants—were they fellow “Aryans” or not? In Denmark, non-Jewish citizens were treated leniently by Nazi authorities at first because the Germans viewed the Danes as racially superior Aryans like themselves. In contrast, the Nazis exercised almost total control in Poland, whose non-Jewish people were primarily Slavic and thus deemed subhuman by the Nazis (and might have been extermination victims if the Nazis had won the war). This total control made citizen rescue efforts extremely risky: rescuers would be killed or sent to concentration camps themselves.
- ♦ The degree of anti-Semitism within an occupied country was a critical factor. Historically many eastern European countries had a strong tradition of anti-Semitism. Denunciations of Jews and those who tried to protect them were common. In such areas, before they could act, prospective rescuers had to overcome deeply ingrained anti-Jewish attitudes as well as the knowledge that their actions on behalf of Jews would be condemned by non-Jewish friends and relatives.
- ♦ In many parts of eastern Europe, Jews and Christians lived in separate social and cultural worlds. This lack of assimilation made it very difficult for Jews to blend into the Christian world. In Poland, for example, over three fourths of all Polish Jews spoke Yiddish or Hebrew as their first language.
- ♦ In some places, it was easier for Jews to physically blend with the rest of the population. Hiding Jews in countries like Italy was made somewhat easier by the fact that many Jews looked similar to their Italian rescuers. Italians saved more than 30,000 Jews following Hitler's occupation of northern Italy in 1943. Nuns, priests, and others hid families in convents or forged new identity papers for those they rescued. In Poland this was not the case.
- ♦ The sheer number of Jews within a particular country and the degree to which these Jews were assimilated also affected their chances of rescue. It was easier to get Denmark's 7,200 Jews to safety than Poland's three million.



YAD VASHEM HONORS THE “RIGHT-EOUS AMONG THE NATIONS” At Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, non-Jews who aided Jews during the Holocaust are honored as Righteous Among the Nations. 27,000 individuals from 51 countries have received this honor as of January 2018. Hundreds of trees have been planted along the Avenue of the Righteous, each bearing a plaque with the rescuer's name and a description of his or her actions. The Avenue of the Righteous reminds visitors of the courage of non-Jews who, despite risk to their own lives and families, refused to stand by while others were persecuted.

ONLINE RESOURCES

■ Resources from Yad Vashem

- ♦ Rescue www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/rescue.html
- ♦ The Righteous Among the Nations www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html
- ♦ Rescuers' Stories (39): Righteous Among the Nations www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories.html
- ♦ The World's Reaction www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/rescue/worlds-reaction.html
- ♦ *Schindler's List* as an Educational Tool (classroom activities)
www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/schindlers-activities.html

■ Resources from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

- ♦ Rescue encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/rescue
- ♦ Rethinking Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Rescuers (lesson)
www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/rethinking-perpetrators-bystanders-and-rescuers-overview-and-background
- ♦ Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust somereneighbors.ushmm.org/
- ♦ The United States & the Holocaust encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-united-states-and-the-holocaust
- ♦ Americans and the Holocaust www.ushmm.org/americans
- ♦ U.S. Immigration and Refugee Law, 1921-1980
encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/united-states-immigration-and-refugee-law-1921-1980

■ Resources from Facing History and Ourselves

- ♦ Holocaust and Human Behavior: 12 chapters of readings/videos/activities
www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior
- ♦ Select Readings from Holocaust and Human Behavior
 - Choices That Define Us www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-10/choices-define-us
 - Choiceless Choices www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-9/choiceless-choices
 - The Holocaust: The Range of Responses
www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/holocaust-range-responses
- ♦ America and the Holocaust www.facinghistory.org/defying-nazis/america-and-holocaust

■ Assessing Responsibility and Conscience (Lesson: PBS)

www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons_plans/the-holocaust-assessing-responsibility-and-conscience/

■ SEE the online Holocaust teaching resources recommended by North Carolina Holocaust educators. ■

www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/holocaust-council/resources/teachingresources.pdf



Access the valuable teaching resources of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust. The museum's offerings include lesson plans, teaching guidelines, online activities, interactive maps, audio and video collections, the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, and other exemplary classroom resources.

LESSON ■ HIDDEN CHILDREN

- **Narrative: Shelly and Rachel Hide on a Farm**
- **Narrative: Renée Hides with a Catholic Family**
- **Narrative: Esther's Rescuers Are Honored**

Of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis, over one million were children. Of those who survived, many did so by going into hiding. Some hid with their families, like Anne Frank, and were helped by friends and underground workers who provided food and provisions. Some were sent by their parents to Christian families or facilities that protected them in “open hiding,” i.e., by presenting them as Christian children. Many in hiding were captured through betrayal or Nazi raids and died in concentration camps, as did Anne Frank.

If your students have read Anne Frank's diary, ask what they most remember about Anne and her adjustment to life in hiding as a teenager. Anne would have been 90 years old today (2019) if she had survived. What questions would students ask Anne if they could meet her? They could ask the same questions of the survivors in this chapter, as all four are alive in 2019 (the year of publication).

Introduce the North Carolina survivors whose narratives are included here. All remained in hiding until their countries were liberated.

- ♦ **Shelly Weiner and Rachel Giralnik Kizhnerman** were five- and six-year-old cousins in Poland when they went into hiding with their mothers on the farm of a Christian family. They settled in Greensboro in 1972 and 1980.
- ♦ **Renée Laser Fink** was four when her parents sent her into “open hiding” with a Christian family in the Netherlands. Her parents did not survive. She settled in Chapel Hill in 1988.
- ♦ **Esther Gutman Lederman** was 18 when she went into hiding in Poland with a boyfriend and his family in the home of a Christian family, the Zals. Her memoir includes a piece written by **Bogdan Zal**, who explains his family's decision to be rescuers. She moved to Chapel Hill in 2004.

Have students consider these questions as they read the narratives.

THE RESCUED _____

1. What circumstances led each person into hiding?
2. Renée, Shelly, and Rachel were very young when they went into hiding (4, 5, 6). How much did they understand of what was happening to them so abruptly?
3. Esther went into hiding when she was 18. How did her experience differ from the young girls' experiences?
4. How did Renée's “open hiding” differ from the secret hiding of Shelly, Rachel, and Esther?
5. What did the hidden children do to spend their time? to protect themselves?

“Translate statistics into people.”

In its guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust (see Supplemental Materials), the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum recommends using first-person accounts of survivors

“precisely because they portray people in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims; [they] add individual voices to a collective experience and help students make meaning out of the statistics.”

6. Did the parents of each hidden child survive the war? How would this affect the child's life after liberation?
7. How did the survivors adjust to coming out of hiding?
8. How did they adjust to life after arriving in the United States? What challenges did they face? How did they meet them?
9. What does Renée Fink mean that for many child survivors the "toughest part was surviving survival"?
10. What does Shelly Weiner mean that, after liberation, she "really wanted to become part of something"?
11. Why has it been important to these four survivors to keep in contact with their rescuers?

THE RESCUERS

12. What motivated the rescuers to hide the Jewish young people? How did they, or the people they rescued, explain their actions?
13. What risks did they face?
14. What did the rescuers do to protect the Jews while in hiding?
15. What did they do to protect themselves?
16. Choose one of these statements from the narratives and write an essay, journal entry, etc., asking yourself how you would hope to act if someone you cared about needed to be hidden to survive.
 - ♦ Bogdan Zal: *"Our decision to save the Lederman family was entirely spontaneous. We couldn't stand by and not offer help. We realized the peril our action would bring in case of discovery."*
 - ♦ Renée Fink: *"This family had a very strong idea of humility and doing the right thing. And for them it wasn't very complicated. That is the only way that the two people I came to call Mama and Papa looked at the world. It was the only right thing for them to do. And they were in total disregard of any danger that was posed to them and eight of their children."*
 - ♦ Shelly Weiner: *"I have often wondered how the Palaschuk family had such strength and bravery to do what they did. To hide us—four people—when they knew that the punishment would be death for them and their children, and all their property would be confiscated. I am not sure how I would react in the same situation. I don't think that many of us would know how we would react."*



ONLINE RESOURCES

- Resources from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
 - ♦ Hidden Children
 - Overview encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/life-in-shadows-hidden-children-and-the-holocaust
 - Online exhibition: Life in Shadows: Hidden Children of the Holocaust, with script, study guide, and annotated bibliography www.ushmm.org/exhibition/hidden-children/index/
 - Hiding: Personal Histories (brief videos with transcripts) www.ushmm.org/exhibition/personal-history/theme.php?th=hiding&t=4
 - Anne Frank: Biography encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/anne-frank-biography
 - ♦ Children during the Holocaust encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/children-during-the-holocaust
 - ♦ Children's Diaries encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/childrens-diaries-during-the-holocaust
- Survival in Hiding (Facing History and Ourselves) www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-9/survival-hiding

■ HIDDEN CHILDREN ■

SHELLY & RACHEL HIDE ON A FARM

First cousins Shelly Weiner and Rachel Giralnik were four and five when the Germans invaded Soviet-controlled Poland in June 1941, occupying Shelly's hometown of Rovno. Six months later, the Nazis massacred 17,500 of the town's Jewish residents, forcing the remaining Jews into a ghetto. In July 1942 these survivors were systematically murdered. Shelly and her mother were able to escape to the nearby village where Rachel and her mother lived. They went into hiding on the farm of Christian neighbors until the Soviet army liberated their region in February 1944. In 2006, Shelly and Rachel were interviewed about their experience, and in 2013 they returned to visit Rovno (now Rivne, Ukraine) and the farm where they had hidden.

SHELLY: The Nazis formed the ghetto, and there were about 5,000 Jews left, and they took all the Jews from the ghetto and they marched them to the center of town, and they walked them to the edge, and they had dug trenches, and they shot them. And that's when our whole family—our aunts and uncles and cousins and my grandfather—they were all killed that day. But my mother had been told by one of her Polish neighbors that they were going to do that, and she snuck us out of the ghetto. And we walked to Rachel's mother's house that night.

INTERVIEWER: *Could you describe the hiding place?*

RACHEL: The first hiding place was in a barn attic.

SHELLY: It wasn't that big. It was just big enough for us to sit down or lie down. We couldn't stand up. We stayed there 18 months.

INTERVIEWER: *What was life like in hiding, in terms of meals and conditions? How did you make it?*

RACHEL: Meals? We depended on the people who hid us. If they had some food, they would bring us something. It was very scarce. Conditions? We didn't have a toilet. It was hot in the summer, it was very, very cold in the winter.

SHELLY: We couldn't bathe. We couldn't change our clothes. We couldn't get up and walk. We couldn't make any noise. We were children. We had nothing to play with. The only thing we had was straw. We didn't have anybody else to talk to. Just us.



Edward Serotta/Centropa
In 2013 Shelly and Rachel returned to Ukraine and visited the farm where they had hidden. They were welcomed by the family's son and daughter-in-law (right). Shelly holds the photograph of the Palaschuks, who hid them for 20 months.

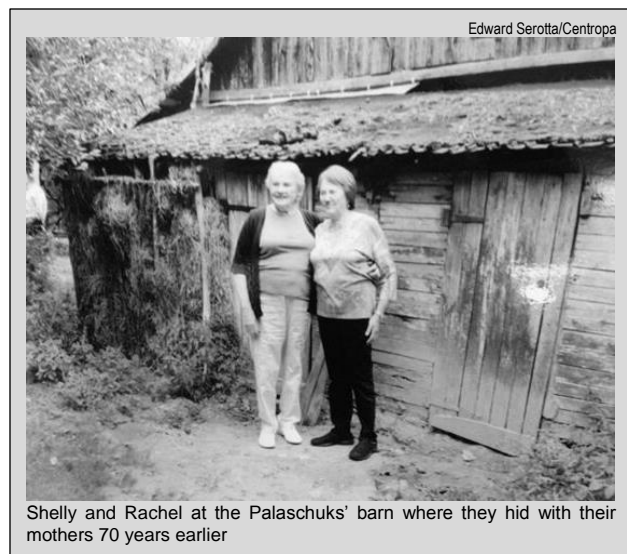


Natalia and Nikinor Palaschuk

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone ever question you or suspect you?

SHELLY & RACHEL: Yes, yes. They were always suspecting.

RACHEL: There were some neighbors who were always suspecting that these people were hiding us. And the Ukrainian nationalists were after Jews, too. And the people who hid us, they were very scared, maybe more of the Ukrainian nationalists than of the Germans, because if they would find us, they would kill them, too. And they had a son who was in charge of all Ukrainian nationalists, and he knew that his parents were hiding us, and that's why they never came to look for us, because he wouldn't let them do it.



Shelly and Rachel at the Palaschuks' barn where they hid with their mothers 70 years earlier

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever threatened during this time?

SHELLY & RACHEL: Yes—oh, yes.

SHELLY: They came once to look for us. The farmer came and told us that they were outside waiting for us. It was amazing, because we were probably five and six at the time. We were very young.

RACHEL: The farmer said they are coming to look for us. They were tipped off.

SHELLY: We had no choice but to come down. And so, the two of us, for some reason, we begged our mothers not to just come down passively. We would take our chances and run into the woods, because the barn was right at the edge of the woods. We just made this plea to them, because they said to the farmer that we needed a few minutes to say goodbye to each other, because they knew what was coming. And that is what we did. We ran into the woods that night, the four of us. And we could hear them that night, looking for us.



Antoshka, age 16, the farmers' daughter who hid with Shelly and Rachel at times when Germans came to the farm for food or to conduct searches

RACHEL: We spent the night in the woods. It was summertime. And then we went from the woods into the cornfields, and we were hiding there, for three days, with no food, no water, nothing.

INTERVIEWER: And then what happened?

SHELLY: Then we came back to the farm, because we were very dehydrated and very sick. It was August. And then the farmer made a place for us in the barn, where the horses drink out of the trough. Just for a week in this horrible trough; it was so hot and horrible. At that time, he was tired of the Germans coming to get his wheat and everything, so he had dug a hole in the woods to put his grain and all his produce and everything. So he said he would dig another hole and put us in it.

RACHEL: And his daughter, too, because he was afraid that the Germans would take his daughter to Germany.

INTERVIEWER: How did you pass the time, all those hours?

SHELLY: We don't know. Our mothers talked to us a lot, told us stories. What else?

RACHEL: We were crushing straw. That was our pastime, playing. And before we went into hiding, there were a lot of things happening. They killed our cousins and our aunt and uncle in a close-by village. Actually the Ukrainian nationalists killed them—and another cousin, Luba—who were coming looking for us; they thought they could hide together with us. They couldn't because they found them, and they were killed.

SHELLY: As children, we knew about all these things, and we heard a lot of those things. Even when we were in the barn, we could hear people being shot and killed, and screaming and crying. So even at that very young age we knew about fear and death.

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SHELLY: There were a lot of side stories we're not telling you.

INTERVIEWER: Would you tell one or two, if you have time?

SHELLY: My Aunt Sonja, Rachel's mother, would tell me that she would sneak out. She had a lot of things that she had stored in different places. She would sneak out in the middle of the night, and she would go to different farms and she

There are very few people our age who survived the war, who were hidden. It had to be not because of what we did or who we are, but it was our mothers. They were very strong women.

would take these things and sell them to the farmers, and bring some of the money to our farmer, so he would have something. And [the farmers] would say "Where are you coming from?" And she would say, "Oh, I'm so far away from here." You know, she would never tell them. Our mothers were very brave women. There are very few people our age who survived the war, who were hidden. It had to be not because of what we did or who we are, but it was our mothers. They were very strong women. And my aunt had stories to tell all the time. She was the one who was brave and would get up in the middle of the night. And she knew all the dogs in the village and they would always follow her, because otherwise she would wake up the whole village and she would be caught.

RACHEL: And something else. We had a cat before the war and, of course, when we went into hiding, the cat was left alone. I don't remember that, but my mother told me that the cat came into that barn where we were hiding, looking for us. Evidently he knew, or he smelled or felt that we were there. The people who were hiding us were afraid that the cat might reveal our existence there.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to the cat?

RACHEL: I don't know. I don't know what happened to the cat.

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INTERVIEWER: How were you able to leave hiding?

SHELLY: We were liberated by the Russian army—the Russian army came in 1944. So the farmer took our mothers into town, or they walked into town—I don't know how they got into town—I think they walked into town, to make sure that it was true; they weren't sure. Then he took us in a wagon and brought us into town.

RACHEL: We were left for a while.

SHELLY: Right. They didn't want to take us yet. I don't know how long we were kept before he took us into town. But the war wasn't over yet, because they were still fighting in 1944. A lot of bombs and things falling, a lot of air raids.

RACHEL: There are a lot of details that we left out. It sounds like it was easy, but it wasn't. It was hell.

SHELLY & RACHEL: There was a lot of hunger, a lot of frostbite. We were frozen, both of us. There were a lot of rats and mice and lice. Hunger and malnutrition.

INTERVIEWER: *As you look back [is there] any memory that particularly stands out?*

RACHEL: Darkness, hunger, fear, cold—

SHELLY: Cold, a lot of cold, and darkness—

RACHEL: Not being able to move around, not being able to talk loud—

SHELLY: I think, yes, darkness. If you go into my house today, there are no curtains on any windows. A lot of light.

RACHEL: I like light, too. I hate dark homes.

SHELLY: Every light goes on as soon as I walk into the house.

INTERVIEWER: *How long was it before you came to the United States?*

SHELLY: Well, that's another long story—

RACHEL: A long story! [laughter]

SHELLY: A long story and a half! In 1945 when the war was over, Stalin [leader of the Soviet Union] made a decree that anybody who was a Polish citizen could go to Poland, so we went to Poland. Rachel and her mother stayed in Russia [in the Ukraine, then a Soviet territory]. And we went to Poland and we were there for about nine months, and then the Poles started having pogroms* again because some of the Jews returned from the concentration camps and wanted their property back, and the Poles did not want to give it up. In one town 60 Jews were slaughtered. We made our way to the American Zone in Germany, so we were in a Displaced Persons camp for three years.† And then we wanted to go to Israel, but Israel was not a



Shelly and her mother in Poland, 1945



Shelly as a flower girl in her uncle's wedding, 1945



Shelly and her parents, Eva and Myer, in a Displaced Persons camp, 1948

* Pogroms are organized massacres of an ethnic group, usually approved or organized by governing authorities, referring primarily to the planned massacres of Jews in eastern Europe and Russia/Soviet Union beginning in the late 19th century and continuing into the 20th century.

† Rachel's father had been forced into the Soviet army. He survived the war and returned to Rivne after the war. Rachel and both of her parents were able to get to the American Zone in Germany.

state [nation] as yet. So we were supposed to go—I'm making this very short—on one of these illegal boats to Israel. We were all packed and ready to go. I got up in the morning and I had the mumps, so we had to give up our places. That boat was captured by the British and there was some fighting, and the people were sent to Cyprus [island in the Mediterranean Sea]. So, again, my mom didn't think it was such a good idea, so we ended up in the United States in 1949. And that's how I got here. That's my story.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like the short version.

SHELLY: Very short version—there's a lot in between.

INTERVIEWER: Rachel, you stayed in Russia?

RACHEL: We stayed there. I went to school, got my education, got married, and had one child. We had not been in touch with Shelly and her mother for a long long time until Stalin died [1953]. And when he died, Shelly's mother, my aunt, found us, and we started corresponding, and they helped us to come to the United States.

INTERVIEWER: And what year did you come to the United States?

RACHEL: In 1980. My mother, I, my husband, and my son.

SHELLY: We had no idea where they were, absolutely none. My mother was walking down the street in Tel Aviv [Israel]. And this man recognized her and said, "I just saw your sister in Russia." We called them. This was in the late 1960s, and he gave her the address, and my mother went to Russia, and then I went with her in 1974. It was still very communist then. Quite interesting.

RACHEL: We moved to Leningrad [now St. Petersburg], and this was where we lived and worked, and I went to school. From Leningrad we came to the United States.



Rachel as a student in Leningrad, Soviet Union (now St. Petersburg, Russia), 1950s



The family in Rome, Italy, in the 1980s. Left to right: Sonya (Rachel's mother), Jerry (Rachel's son), Shelly, Rachel, and Anatoly (Rachel's husband).

INTERVIEWER: Could you describe your life when you reached the U.S.?

SHELLY: I went to school in Philadelphia. For me as a 12-year-old, it was very interesting. I had never ridden in a car. The most fascinating thing as a 12-year-old was I never believed such a thing as television existed—because, well, that's crazy. How can you see things in the air, pictures being transmitted in the air? And I walked into a cousin's house and there was a television set, and I sat right down and watched it. And things like wallpaper—the most amazing things I thought about—full-length mirrors. These are things that



Shelly and Rachel with their mothers, Eva and Sonya, in Greensboro, NC, ca. 1996

I had never experienced. Telephones were kind of strange. We didn't have that at all. But it didn't take me long to adjust. I very much wanted to be part of something, because I hadn't been part of anything. I didn't have a childhood, did not have any friends, never played with toys. Didn't have a place—even in the Displaced Persons camps, we moved around a lot. We didn't have a home or apartment; we lived in one room. I really wanted to become part of something.

INTERVIEWER: Rachel, you came much later to the United States. How was it for you when you arrived here?

RACHEL: It wasn't easy. It was very difficult. The most difficult part of it was not knowing the language. This was a big obstacle in getting a job, getting around, everyday life. Was very, very difficult. Of course, I came as an adult, and it was different from Shelly. We did have TV and radio and whatnot [laughs]. I was an accountant back in Russia,

and when I came here, of course, I couldn't be an accountant, and it was very difficult to get my first job. It was a big problem. It was difficult because back in Russia you were somebody. Here you are nobody [as a new immigrant]. You have to get whatever job comes. That was difficult—difficult emotionally to accept that. You can't work. You're treated differently than you were treated there. You're kind of second-class people. People look at you differently. But then after I learned English, everything fell into place.

INTERVIEWER: Many years later, did you ever keep in touch with the descendants of the people who hid you?

SHELLY & RACHEL: Yes, yes.

RACHEL: After the war, the people who hid us, they were still alive, but I don't remember when they passed away; they were older people. Their daughter was still alive, and their son was killed at the very end of the war. And we were in touch with their daughter until we left the Soviet Union, I and my mother.

SHELLY: We also stayed in touch with her. My mother and I ended up coming to the United States in 1949. We stayed in touch with her; we wrote her. We could send packages; there was a way to send packages to Russia, and we wrote to her and sent pictures and everything until 1984. And she died. We were planning actually to go see her in 1984. Her name was Antoshka. She lived on the farm.



Shelly and Rachel at the barn where they hid with their mothers before moving to an underground bunker after the Germans searched for them on the farm

Rachel: "Going back to the hiding place in 2013 was very, very emotional. . . . The hiding place was still there, and it was the same way exactly as we left it in 1945. The only person who lived there is a daughter-in-law of the people who hid us . . . her son, her grandchildren, and she, they were very, very happy to see us."

Shelly: "I have often wondered how the Palaschuk family had such strength and bravery to do what they did. To hide us—four people—when they knew that the punishment would be death for them and their children, and all their property would be confiscated. I am not sure how I would react in the same situation. I don't think that many of us would know how we would react."

Return to Rivne (video, Centropa)

In 2013 Shelly and Rachel returned to their hometown and visited the farm where they had hidden. A video on their experience—Return to Rivne—was produced by Centropa. In 2015 Shelly returned again to contribute to Centropa’s teacher seminar program.

Shelly met Frank Weiner in high school in Philadelphia and they married in 1958, moving to Greensboro in 1972. They have three daughters and five grandchildren. In 1957 Rachel married Anatoly Kizhnerman in the Soviet Union, and they came to Greensboro in 1980. They have one son and two grandchildren. Shelly and Rachel continue to speak about their Holocaust experiences across the state.

[See Anatoly Kizhnerman’s narrative in Ch. 4, The Holocaust.]

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Oral testimony of Shelly Weiner & Rachel Kizhnerman, 2006, 3 hrs. (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)
collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn607952
- *Return to Rivne: A Holocaust Story* (video, 23:33, Centropa, 2015, with script & study guide)
 - ◆ Video www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/return-rivne-holocaust-story?language=en
 - ◆ Script www.centropa.org/sites/default/files/film_script/return-to-rivne-final_script.pdf
- “Holocaust survivors to speak about revisiting hiding places,” [Greensboro] *News & Record*, October 11, 2013 www.greensboro.com/news/local_news/holocaust-survivors-to-speak-about-revisiting-hiding-places/article_1f5a24cb-8f8e-516c-99ad-7fb15c76adc8.html
- Videos on other hidden-children survivors in North Carolina, with lesson plans (Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education in North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC)
 - ◆ Renée Fink: On the Back of a Stranger’s Bicycle (see narrative excerpts in this chapter, p. 122)
youtu.be/eJAiC7fJXSo
 - ◆ Esther Lederman: Hiding for Our Lives (see narrative excerpts in this chapter, p. 128)
youtu.be/J1mvWa2ky5M



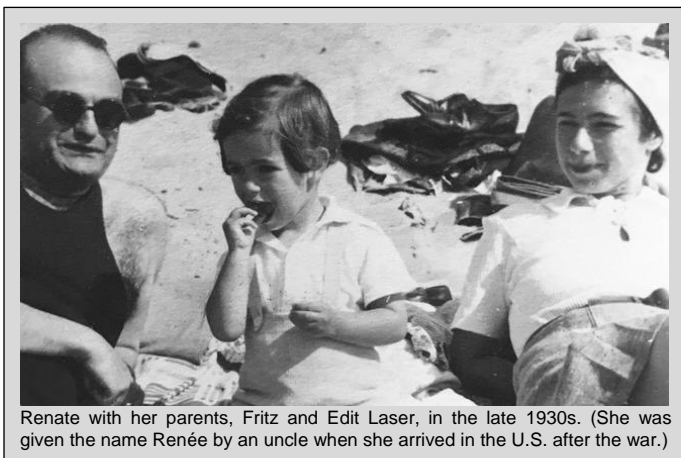
Excerpted and adapted from the oral testimony of Shelly Weiner and Rachel Kizhnerman, November 14, 2006; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of Marcia Horn, collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn607952. Reproduced by permission of Shelly Weiner and Rachel Kizhnerman and courtesy of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Excerpts presented in chronological order; breaks in narrative order designated by horizontal dividers. Family photographs reproduced by permission of Shelly Weiner and Rachel Kizhnerman.

■ HIDDEN CHILDREN ■

RENÉE HIDES WITH A CATHOLIC FAMILY

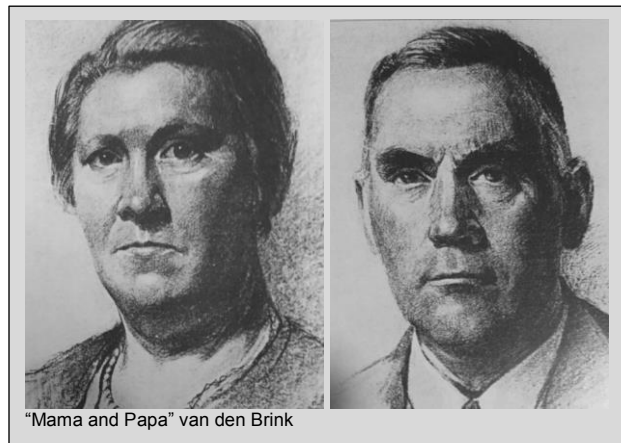
Renate Laser was born in Holland (the Netherlands) in 1937, the only child of her German parents who left Germany in 1933 when Hitler gained power. After the Nazis conquered Holland in 1940, life for Jewish residents became increasingly dangerous. Many went into hiding like the family of Anne Frank. In 1942, before Renate's parents went into hiding, they arranged through the underground to place their daughter with a Christian family. Renate became Rita van den Brink, "hidden in plain sight" until the end of the war. She never saw her parents again.

We were lower than dogs or cockroaches. Little by little [after the Nazi invasion], all our freedoms were taken away. Jews could not practice professions. Lawyers couldn't be lawyers. Doctors couldn't be doctors. Children could not go to public school. We were not allowed to be in public places or parks. We couldn't shop for groceries or necessary things except for very prescribed hours during the day, but by that time all the goods would virtually be gone. And at that time things became extremely bad and dangerous for Jews. We either had to go into hiding or be picked up in what were called razzias—the raids.



Renate with her parents, Fritz and Edit Laser, in the late 1930s. (She was given the name Renée by an uncle when she arrived in the U.S. after the war.)

But the Dutch underground was extremely active, and proportionately there were—if you keep in mind that Holland was such a small country—there were more what is called “righteous among the nations” or “righteous Christians” than in a lot of other countries. And at the same time, there was a tremendous number of collaborators known as NSBers* who were very sympathetic to all things German and were more than eager to work with the Germans. There was a lot going on, and with the help of the underground, which may be more commonly known as the Resistance, two hiding places were found. I went into one hiding place for a short time, which I know nothing about. And then the van den Brink family was found, and we stayed together for the duration of the war.



"Mama and Papa" van den Brink

There are books written about what motivated the righteous Christians in Holland. This family was Catholic and they had a very strong idea of humility and doing the right thing. And for them it wasn't very complicated. That is the only way that the two people I came to call Mama and Papa looked at the world. It was the only right thing for them to do. And they were in total disregard of any danger that was posed to them and eight of

* NSB: Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging—the National Socialist (Nazi) Party of the Netherlands.



The van den Brinks and their eight children, aged approximately 10 to 24, lived in the left side of this duplex house in Laren, Holland. Renée joined them as a four-year-old Jewish girl whose parents feared it was the only way to save her life. (The painting was commissioned by Wilhelmina van den Brink, the oldest child, as a gift for Renée.)

their children. And it posed—I mean, to say “great danger” is such an understatement—they were all risking their lives to place even one little person like me for whatever length of time I ended up being there. So imagine, if they did the right thing, they had no idea if it would be a week or a month, or six months, and it ended up being from 1942 until well into 1945—May 4th.

I came to the house one day on the back of a stranger’s bicycle. I didn’t know who the stranger was. I did not have the first inkling of why I was on her bicycle. Neither would I ever have realized until I was older what it meant to my parents to see me off on this bicycle with a very nice woman who obviously was one of the underground workers. So I came—

I don’t know if it took many hours for the trip; I don’t remember those details, at age four.

Knowledge was dangerous, and that’s why going back to the woman who took me on her bicycle, knowing now the way the underground worked—everybody was a cog, a tiny cog in a very large machine. For them not to know anything beyond what they were doing was the only safe way, whether it was delivering a child from one address to another, or printing a flyer, or doing any number of hundreds of jobs. They were tiny jobs and that person only knew what he was doing. Everybody had false names; therefore you couldn’t give anyone away.

After I got to this house, there were no more explanations, and I was just, kind of, in some kind of a survival mode. I lost my tongue and my appetite, and I was very homesick. I grew to love every one of these siblings. Five brothers and three sisters. There was a lot of love, but in a very stoic non-demonstrative way.*

The Germans kept such incredible records that they knew who was Jewish and who wasn’t. Holland was such a topsy-turvy place, you know, after the bombing of Rotterdam, between the 10th and the 14th of May in 1940. There were a lot of non-Jewish people also displaced, because they had been bombed out of their houses. So you had people looking for shelter, and Jewish people on the run looking for hiding places. And Germans coming and making house searches. Where I lived they were constantly searching. I was Jewish, and I was putting everyone at terrible risk, and their sons were conscript material [eligible for the military draft]—they were the age when the Germans would have taken them.



Over 400 Jewish men were rounded up and deported in a Nazi “razzia” (raid) in Amsterdam, February 1941.

* Bert van den Brink was ten years old when Renate arrived. In a letter to Renée in 2014, he related how he learned that someone was joining their family: “One day my Dad took me aside to speak to me. I thought, what have I done wrong now? But he said, ‘Tomorrow we are going to have a little girl come here and she is going to be your little sister and her name is Rita, and if anyone ever asks you about her you must always say she is your sister.’” [*Prism*, June 2017]

And then in addition to those major fears, the Germans took whatever they wanted. And if you were caught with a radio or anything that was contraband [forbidden], you were in grave danger, too. There was a little bit of panic each time. I think they really had to get rid of me into some little corner of the house. With enough warning I was tossed into a bed upstairs in one of the bedrooms; they'd cover me up with blankets. And my hair got covered that way, so it wouldn't raise questions about my appearance. They would point to me and start coughing and say "TB" [tuberculosis], and the Germans ran. It never failed. My hair was covered up, because in some cases Jewish children had their darker hair dyed so that they looked a little bit more Christian if they were not looking like the family.

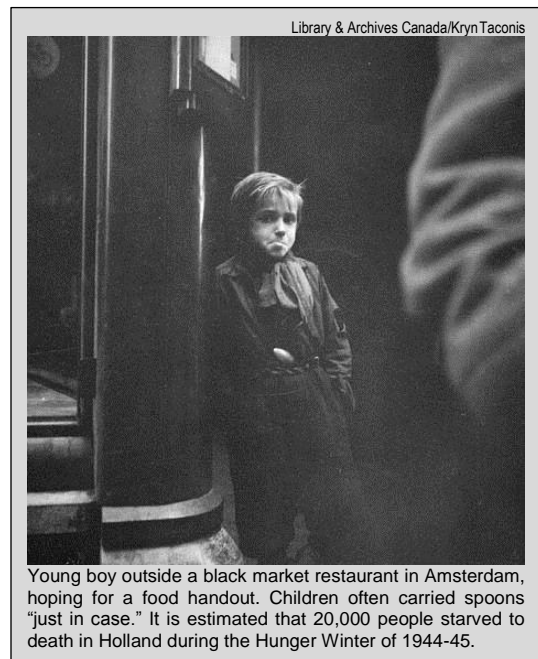
My aunt and my grandmother were hiding, and they were on the run. They spent some time on the run together, and then they separated. My aunt and my uncle were working in the underground. My uncle said to my aunt at one time, "We're dead, either way, so we might as well make our lives count for something," and they joined the underground. So they did that. My parents went into hiding together and they were betrayed.*

I'm telling you about my grandmother's visit. One year while I was in hiding and she was on the run—she must have been in the east of Holland at that particular time. She spent two nights walking in the dark and hiding in the day so that she wouldn't be picked up. We were not free and had to have ID papers. [Jews had to wear the yellow star, and their ID papers were stamped with the letter J.] Certainly you couldn't be Jewish without being picked up and sent to the camps. So she appeared on my birthday. She didn't stay long, but it was unforgettable.

I remember going to bed hungry every night.† And along with missing my parents, I was just wishing for food and thinking a lot about being hungry. We had some fake foods like bread. Now I call it "ersatz bread," but it may be better known as "wartime" or fake bread, just like "ersatz coffee." But every day we must have had a loaf of something that was called bread. And every night I went to bed thinking—and keep in mind, it was always exactly cut into the number of family members—11 of us, 11 equal slices. Somehow the heel seemed a little thicker. And so we each got our turn at the heel of the bread. And I would go to bed at night thinking "tomorrow is my turn to get the heel."

There were people starving, and they came—endless knocks on the door of people begging for food, just to survive.

There were people starving and they came—endless knocks on the door of people begging for food, just to survive. And every time there was a knock, my oldest Catholic sister answered and gave something to whoever was begging. This went on for a long time, and they always shared. Now, modesty and humility were a big part, so I know we shared proudly, but it



* Renée's mother and father were murdered in Auschwitz. Her uncle was shot and killed on a street in Utrecht. Her aunt and grandmother survived the war and reunited with Renée.

† More than 20,000 people died during the Hunger Winter of 1944-1945 in the Netherlands, caused by the severe winter and the Nazis' stopping food shipments to northern Holland after the Allies and Dutch resistance liberated southern Holland. People had to survive on 400-800 calories a day.

The fact that I appeared suddenly in this town, in this household, must have been the source of constant fear. Your neighbors could turn you in. Those were days we lived with fear on a level that is not easily explained.

The fact that I appeared suddenly in this town, in this household, must have been the source of constant fear. Your neighbors could turn you in. Those were days we lived with fear on a level that is not easily explained. So when I say they risked their lives every day—anyone could've turned them in at any time. And that's one reason they took their chances: they did it, they took me in. But they couldn't send me to public school; that would have raised a lot of questions. Church, I guess, wasn't an option: we went. But I never got to go to school. I never learned to read or write [during the war].

I'm going to tell you a little about different ways of hiding. My hiding experience was true for me. Other children were also hidden. Some went from house to house. Many were abused physically, sexually. Some were made into little slaves. I mean, there are horror stories about hiding, and they didn't all get families like [mine]. I was so incredibly fortunate. In some cases tiny hidden spaces were created behind walls.

My hiding was what I personally call a kind of open hiding, because Anne Frank comes to the minds of many people. She was what I call in a closed hiding, never to be seen or heard by anyone outside those walls. I could go outside at certain times, yet one of my brothers used to think back and feel sorry for me that I didn't get to come and go in the house as freely as the others. But I personally don't remember that.

Some little babies were pushed into bureau drawers, which were closed if there was a danger of being discovered. Others hid in barns, in haystacks, in chicken houses. One of my friends was thrown into a coal bin, underneath all the coal, at the age of two, his parents hoping he would be discovered in time, because Germans would come and poke with bayonets. Other children were thrown out of moving trains when possible, [their parents] thinking that was no worse than certain death. And some frantic Jewish

was never mentioned. Yet I knew what was going on because it was always visible.

Then came the day there were knocks at the door, and Zus didn't answer, because we didn't have food to share. That would have had to be, I realize now, what was called in Holland the Hunger Winter, the winter of 1944-45. It was one of the coldest winters, and the food supplies had really run out. We were reduced to eating flour mixed with water, and sometimes we had smushed or mashed-up tulip bulbs, and we ate that.



USHMM/Lennie Jade
Aaron Jedwab was born in hiding and taken immediately to live with a Dutch Resistance leader who told neighbors he was an abandoned child. When he was reunited with his parents after the war, a "sister" lived with them for a time to help with his transition.



USHMM/Susie Grunbaum Schwarz
Susie Grunbaum lies in the barn attic storeroom where she and her mother hid for two years, protected by a Dutch Christian family.



USHMM/Marion I. Cassirer
Marion Kaufmann, a hidden child (right), with Rie Beelen, daughter of the Dutch Christian family who hid Marion until liberation, when she was reunited with her mother.

parents carrying infants desperately offered them to strangers on the street or in train stations. Hidden children were very good and very quiet and very well behaved.

Some parents paid money to families to take their children. That's another special quality about the van den Brinks—they did not do this for money. But in too many cases there was money involved, not only in Holland, but especially in the east [of Europe]. And when money ran out, children got kicked out into the street. And there are some pretty awful stories about little children on the run, and feral children running in the woods.

After the war, I want to make it clear that, in the case of too many child survivors, our lives fell apart then and in the years that followed. I think for us, the toughest part was surviving survival. My grandmother knew where I was, so we were united, eventually. I desperately wanted to stay with the van den Brinks, but I went and lived with my beloved grandmother. And then before I knew it, I was told that we were going to America.

We survivors are speaking for many reasons. We must make sure the world never forgets and repeats. We must respond to Holocaust deniers and revisionists. We must speak for standing up for one's beliefs and having the courage to do that. I can easily respond to any questions about deniers and revisionists. We have the Germans to thank for that. They kept impeccable records. They were crazy for recording all the details, all the numbers, all the timetables of the trains. And if that's not good enough for people, then we can thank General Eisenhower for having his soldiers document through film and still photography what they found in the camps. There are all sorts of records. And I can say to students, if you come across such people, tell them you've met me.



Renée, ca. 1949



Renée on her wedding day, 1957

Renate and her grandmother arrived in the U.S. in 1948 due to the efforts of Renate's father's cousin, Walter, who had emigrated from Germany in the mid-1930s, and who had married Renate's aunt after she arrived in the U.S. in 1947. Walter gave Renate another new name—Renée—because he thought people would mispronounce her name. Renée graduated from high school and attended the University of Vermont, where in 1957 she met her husband, Edward Fink. They were married for 45 years and had two children and five grandchildren. They moved from New Jersey to North Carolina in 1988.

In the 1960s, Renée reconnected with "Papa" van den Brink and the children ("Mama" had died during the war). In 1972 she and her family made their first trip to visit them. In 2014 she joined over 50 members of the van den Brink family to celebrate a reunion in Holland. In 1987, Johannes Gijsbertus and Maria van den Brink-Zoon were formally recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, and by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.



ONLINE RESOURCES

- Oral testimony of Renée Fink (source of excerpts presented here): "On the Back of a Stranger's Bicycle," 2014 (Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education of N.C./Holocaust Speakers Bureau, Chapel Hill, NC)
 - ♦ Video: 24 min. www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJAiC7fJXSo
 - ♦ Lesson and Power Point www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org/videos.html
- Oral testimony of Renée Fink, 2006, video: 110 min. (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)
 collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn607950
- Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Israel
 - ♦ Righteous Among the Nations www.yadvashem.org/righteous
 - ♦ Entry on the van den Brinks db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4043113
- Nancy Lefenfeld, "Memory, Knowledge, and Family Love," on Renee Fink's experience as a hidden child and her life after the war, *Prism: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Education*, Spring 2017, 25-34.
 www.scribd.com/document/343887648/PRISM-2017

Excerpted and adapted from the narrative of Renée Fink, "On the Back of a Stranger's Bicycle," 2014 (Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education of N.C./Holocaust Speakers Bureau, Chapel Hill, NC), youtu.be/eJAiC7fJXSo. Reproduced by permission of Renée Fink and Sharon Halperin (director, Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education of N.C., www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org). Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Family photographs reproduced by permission of Renée Fink.

■ HIDDEN CHILDREN ■

ESTHER'S RESCUERS ARE HONORED

Esther Gutman was born in 1924 in Lodz, Poland. After the Nazis invaded in 1939, her family took refuge in a nearby town. In 1942 the Germans began rounding up the town's Jews, including Esther's father. Esther had a friend, Ezjel Lederman, who had gone into hiding with his family in the home of Christian friends, the Zals. Esther asked them to take her in too, with her mother and sister, but her mother and sister were arrested before she could return for them; she never saw them again. The Zals hid Esther and the Ledermans for 22 months.

Bogdan Zal is one of two surviving members of the Catholic family who saved Esther and the Lederman family from arrest and murder by the Nazis. Years later Esther asked Bogdan to write a chapter for her memoir, *Hiding for Our Lives* (2007). His narrative is excerpted here.

___In Bogdan Zal's Own Words___

At the outbreak of World War II in the fall of 1939, I visited the Lederman family in Chmielnik, about 20 km [12 miles] from my home in Grzymala. At that time I met his parents and his younger brother Ezjel. We formed a close friendship. We agreed with the Ledermans that in case the situation for Jews in Chmielnik becomes unbearable and dangerous, due to the new acts of persecution by the Germans, they should feel free to come to our home through back roads and wait out the crisis. They did that on a number of occasions in the years 1940-1942. They would always return to Chmielnik after the situation became calmer.

I remember exactly that on October 2, 1942, the whole Lederman family came to our home upset that the Germans were preparing some drastic action against the Jews. It turned out to be the total liquidation of the ghetto. The Germans collected the Jews in the market place and led them to the railroad. They took them to Jedrzejow and from there to Treblinka [concentration camp]. After the total evacuation the Germans checked the vacant dwellings in Chmielnik and killed any Jews they found hiding. The Germans issued an edict that the punishment for hiding Jews is the execution of the offending family and burning of the property. One was obliged to report any Jews hiding in the forest or other places.

Our family together with the Ledermans finally decided to make the hiding places in the village, in the old [family] house. We had to organize in secrecy so that strangers saw and heard nothing. In the beginning the Ledermans found themselves in the attic, then in the pantry, under which there was a potato cellar. An entrance to the cellar was created, where a box was built and covered with potatoes.



Esther Gutman



Bogdan Zal (left), with his cousin Wieslawa, and Ms. Zalewska

Our decision to save the Lederman family was entirely spontaneous. We couldn't stand by and not offer help.

A few days later an 18-year-old girl with false papers as a Catholic showed up unexpectedly asking for help—Esther Gutman. She claimed to be a friend of Ezjel who told her our address and told her she could count on our help. She asked for help for herself as well as for her mother and sister who remained in Chmielnik.

Esther did not know that the Ledermans were already hiding with the Zal family. She left our home and found shelter in a nearby village. The citizens of that village suspected her of being Jewish and she was afraid to remain there. Under cover of darkness Esther found her way to our home again and told us that her [false ID] papers were in the hands of the mayor of the village. Jozef, our brother, went to that village immediately and retrieved the false ID, which could not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Germans. Esther was sent to the forest for the night. The next day, after a meeting with the Ledermans, it was decided that Esther would go into hiding together with the Ledermans.

In the evening we took Esther to the attic. She got frightened that there was someone there, but after recognizing the Ledermans she calmed down and was delighted. Now the family in hiding consisted of five people.

Now, our immediate goal was to keep the fact that we were hiding a Jewish family in strictest secrecy from our neighbors and numerous other people coming to the house. We had activists from various resistance groups! Peasant Battalions, Land Army, National Armies Forces, reporters from the underground press, all meeting at our house and discussing policies. Nobody knew or got any inkling about the hidden Jewish family. Ezjel showed the greatest initiative in the planning of secret hiding places. A hiding place was dug out under the floor in the empty chamber. The entrance was covered by a box of dirt. Air was being brought through a duct from the outside. His hiding place was used frequently as a result of rumors circulating of German raids.

Germans used to come to demand farm products like grain, livestock, and dairy products. They also organized raids to hunt down healthy young individuals for forced labor in the Reich. During the raids the Ledermans were urged to stay in the special hiding places.

In our village there were many underground activists. Germans tried to get them arrested. There were raids and searches in homes of people whose names were on the Gestapo lists.

There was a lot of optimism and hope in the underground press, and a large number of these secret publications passed through our home. Ezjel was the main commentator of the progress of the war in Europe. He marked the progress of the Allied armies in the east, west, and south, as well as in Africa and Italy.

Esther kept writing postcards to her father, who was doing forced labor in an armament factory in northern Poland. We would mail these cards from neighboring

Esther Lederman: *We would stand at the window, our only fragile link to the outside world, for long spans of time and watch chickens pecking at the ground, dogs chasing the chickens, cows ambling by, horses being driven to and from fields, birds in search of worms, worms wiggling away from the birds. They were all free; they could do as they pleased, they could search for their own food, defend their own lives. They could fight for their own existence, enjoy the sunshine, and even look for shelter in cold and rain.*

We could not do any of these things. We were not allowed to actively participate in the act of living. We were passively dependent on other people's charity, mood, goodwill, and circumstances. We could only eat food given to us, drink the wisdom of centuries encapsulated in books given to us, and wait for fate to be kind to us.

towns so the Germans could not trace the place they came from, or who was sending them. It turned out that Esther's father did indeed keep receiving them, and after his liberation told us they gave him hope and courage to survive.

Days and weeks were passing in expectation of liberation from the German occupation. We lived constantly in fear of the Germans storming into the house and finding the hidden Jewish family. Finally in July 1944 the Soviet army approached the River Vistula and created a beachhead at the town of Baranow. The area around Grzymala was freed from the Germans. I clearly remember the moment in August at dawn when the Ledermans alighted from the bunker telling us that they heard the Russian language most certainly coming from the Soviet soldiers. There was great joy that finally the nightmare was over.

At that time I had a crystal-powered radio which I put together and tried to get some detailed information about the situation in our area. This radio aroused suspicion in the Soviet military. This was a war zone and it could indicate a secret spy station.

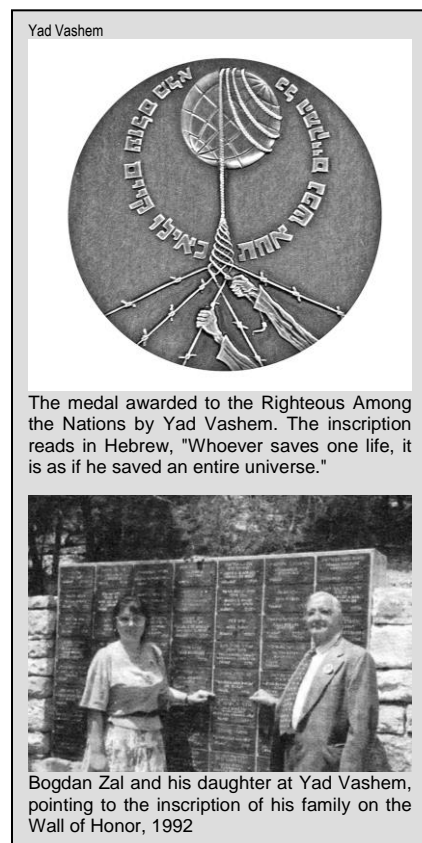
Captain Schneidklotz came to arrest me but I was in the old house. He took my father hostage and left for Grzymala to arrest me. I managed to hide since my brother Jozef came to warn me. Mme. Zalewska took Captain Schneidklotz to the Lederman family and explained to him that I could not be a spy for the Germans. I saved a whole family. Captain Schneidklotz saw that the saved family was Jewish.

It turned out that he was also Jewish. There was tremendous surprise, greetings, laughter, and crying for joy. The captain sent his adjutant for food, vodka, and we had a feast. He wanted to meet me and thank me personally for saving a Jewish family. This was the beginning of a great friendship between our family and the captain.

Our decision to save the Lederman family was entirely spontaneous. We couldn't stand by and not offer help. We realized the peril our action would bring in case of discovery. The Germans killed everyone caught hiding Jews.

At this time [2005] I and my sister Janina on our side, and Esther on the Lederman side, are the only survivors. We developed the kind of relationship which is much deeper than any in families. I derive great pride and joy in Esther's children's accomplishments. Esther always tells me that these are my children and my grandchildren, since thanks to me their parents and grandparents were saved from annihilation and were able to create this kind of a generation.

Esther Lederman: *It was August 3, 1944, when the Russians, our liberators, arrived. But now what? How to get out of the Zals' house? How to leave the house without tipping off the neighbors to the fact that five Jews had been hidden there throughout a 22-month period? How to sneak out without exposing the Zals to the response of their neighbors, who considered it a crime to harbor Jews? This was no imaginary danger. We understood full well that if the neighbors found out about us the Zals would come to harm.*





I can proudly state that my family was awarded the medal of “The Righteous Among Nations,” and a tablet was installed on the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. I also received honorary citizenship from the State of Israel.

In 1984 the Zal family—Jan and Maria Zal, their sons Jan, Antoni [Bogdan], and Jozef, and their granddaughter Wiesława Wasowicz, were given the honored designation of “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel.

Esther was reunited with her father after the war, and they left Poland with the Ledermans to stay in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany. She and Ezjel married in 1946 and arrived in the U.S. in 1949, living in New York where Ezjel practiced medicine. They have four children, seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. In 2004 Esther moved to Chapel Hill, NC, to be near one of her daughters. She continues to speak to students and other groups about her Holocaust experience.



ONLINE RESOURCES

- “Hiding for Our Lives: Esther Lederman’s Story,” 2015 (Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education of NC/Holocaust Speakers Bureau, Chapel Hill, NC)
 - ♦ Video: 29 min. (three parts)
 - (1) youtu.be/J1mvWa2ky5M (2) youtu.be/ZuXXjKpg-4c (3) youtu.be/F3mbBLXRSAM
 - ♦ Lesson and Power Point www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org/videos.html
- The Righteous Among the Nations (Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Israel) www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html
 - ♦ The Zal family, honored as Righteous Among the Nations db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4039840
 - ♦ Online exhibition: I AM My Brother’s Keeper: A Tribute to the Righteous Among the Nations www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/index.asp
 - ♦ Photo gallery: The Bond between Rescuers and Rescued www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/gallery.asp

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