**Rescuers**

Rescuers are those who, at great personal risk, actively helped members of persecuted groups, primarily Jews, during the Holocaust in defiance of Third Reich policy. They were ordinary people who became extraordinary people because they acted in accordance with their own belief systems while living in an immoral society. Thousands survived the Holocaust because of the daring of these rescuers. Although in total their number is statistically small, rescuers were all colossal people.

Rescuers were peasants and nannies, aristocrats and clergy, bakers and doctors, social workers and storekeepers, school children and police officers, diplomats and grandmothers. They were from many countries—the Netherlands, the Ukraine, Poland, Germany, France, Hungary, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Belgium and other nations. Rescuers viewed Jews and other victims not as the enemy, but as human beings. Generally, rescuers were able to accept people who were different than them. They also held the conviction that what one person did could make a difference.

Each rescue story is different. Yet, what rescuers had in common was a combination of awareness, resourcefulness, empathy, vigilance, inventiveness, courage, compassion, and persistence. First, a rescuer had to recognize that a person was endangered, something that was not always clear because of the propaganda and the secrecy of the Nazis. Many rescuers today recount that witnessing one horrifying incident between Nazis and their victims propelled them into becoming rescuers. Next, rescuers had to decide whether or not to assume the responsibility of helping and risk the potential consequences. Public hangings, deportation to concentration camps, and on-the-spot shootings were very real consequences of helping enemies of the Third Reich. After the rescuers found ways to help, they took action. Sometimes the entire transformation from bystander to rescuer took just seconds, and, in certain cases, was not even a conscious decision.

People rescued others for various reasons. Some were motivated by a sense of morality. Others had a relationship with a particular person or group. Some were politically driven and were adamantly opposed to the Third Reich. Other rescuers were involved at work, as diplomats, nurses, social workers, and doctors, and continued their involvement beyond their professional obligation. Many children followed in their parents' footsteps and became rescuers.

Rescuers possessed an inner core of unshakable values and beliefs that enabled them to take a stand against the horrific injustices Hitler perpetrated during his twelve years in power. As social psychologist Dr. Eva Fogelman explains in *Conscience and Courage:*

It was a reign which, nearly half a century later, still challenges our understanding. Evil was rewarded and good acts were punished. Bullies were aggrandized and the meek trampled. In this mad world, most people lost their bearings. Fear disoriented them, and self-protection blinded them. A few, however, did not lose their way. A few took their direction from their own moral compass.

TOAST- To the power of the human spirit, and to the brave individuals that came before us who did not stand idly by to allow others to parish. Today we honor the rescuers of The Holocaust and remember their sacrifices. May we be so brave if it is ever required of us! In the words of William Faulkner, "I believe that man will not merely endure, he will prevail because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.” To you amazing young men and women… that you will have compassion and endure!