Carnegie Shul Chatter

July 12, 2017

True Heroes – In the Hardest of Times

I finally saw the movie, *The Zookeeper's Wife*, a few nights ago. For those who have not seen it, it is based upon the true story of Antonina Żabiński and her husband, Jan Żabiński, director of the Warsaw Zoo. The couple saved the lives of 300 Jews who had been imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto following the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.

It is a powerful story of two Righteous Gentiles, who like Oskar Schindler and others risked their own lives to hide and protect Jews from the Nazis in World War II.

A minor character in *The Zookeepr's Wife*, but by no means a minor character in reality, was Janusz Korczak, a true hero who is honoured with a statue at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Israel.

Below is Janusz Korozak's story, as told by the Holocaust Research Project.

Never Again!

After the horror of the holocaust the world shouted, "Never again." Never again would the world permit massive genocide such as that undertaken by the Nazis against Jews and others prior to and during World War II.

But, sadly, the vow of, "Never Again," has not been kept.

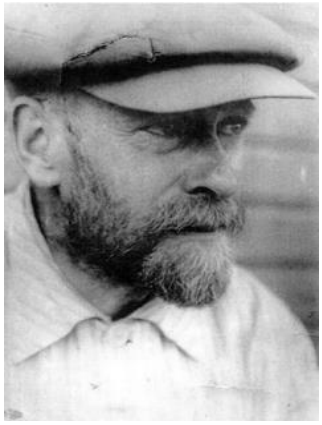
There have been many genocides since World War II! in places like the Sudan, Nigeria, and the Balkans, but the world has not stood up as one to stop them.

In some cases there have been condemnations in the United Nations, and sometimes there has been some military action, but genocides and "ethnic cleansings" have continued.

As horrible as these genocides have been, how can the world stop them all? How many wars can be fought? Are there enough men to go to battle to stop evil everywhere that it exists in this world?

I hate the fact that there is so much evil in this world and apparently we are helpless to stop it all. And I would have been appalled if the world had failed to try to stop Hitler.

I honestly don't know what can be done, and I am not sure that anything short of the arrival of Moshiach that can stop all of the evil, but I pray that someone a lot smarter than me finds a way to put a stop to genocide.



Janusz Korczak

Janusz Korczak was the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit born in 1878 or 1879, physician, writer and educator. He was born in Warsaw, the son of an assimilated Jewish family.

Korczak's father was a successful attorney who became mentally ill when Korczak was eleven. This was a heavy blow to the family's financial situation and a trauma that cast its shadow over Korczak throughout his life.

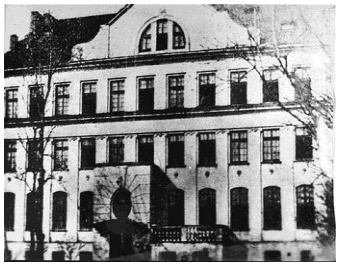
Even while still a student of medicine at Warsaw University, Korczak was drawn to circles of liberal educators and writers in Poland. When he entered medical practice, he did his best to help the poor and those who suffered the most, at the same time he began to write.

His first books, Children of the Streets (1901) and A Child of the Salon (1906) aroused great interest. In 1904 he was drafted into the Russian army as a doctor, and was posted to East Asia.

Both as a doctor and a writer, Korczak was drawn to the world of the child. He worked in a Jewish children's hospital and took groups of children to summer camps, and in 1908 he began to work with orphans.

In 1912 he was appointed director of a new and spacious Jewish orphanage in Warsaw, on Krochmalna Street. Throughout his life, his partner in his work was Stefania Wilczynska, a superb educator, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish family who dedicated her life to the care of orphans and greatly influenced Korczak and his career as an educator.

Children's hospital



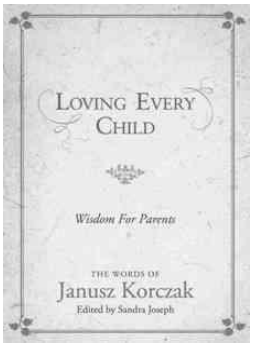
Krochmalna Street orphanage

In the orphanage, Korczak studied the secret depths of the child's soul, and it was in the orphanage that he made practical application of his educational ideas. Korczak called for an understanding of the emotional life of children and urged that children be respected. A child was not be regarded as something to be shaped and trained to suit adults, but rather as someone whose soul was rich in perception and ideas, who should be observed and listened to within his or her own autonomous sphere. Every child, he maintained, has to be dealt with as an individual whose inclinations and ambitions, and the conditions under which he or she is growing up, require understanding.

In several of his books – such as King Matthew the First (1923), When I am Small Again (1925), and the short theoretical work The Child's Right to Respect (1929) – Korczak stressed the social conflict between child and adult in a situation when power and control are in the hands of the adult, even when the adult does not understand or refuses to understand the child's world, and deliberately deprives the child of his or her due. In Korczak's view "to reform the educational system."

In 1914 Korczak was again called up for military service in the Russian army, and it was in military hospitals and bases that he wrote his important work How to Love Children.

After the war he returned to Poland – now independent – and to his work in the Jewish orphanage, but he was also asked to take charge of an orphanage for Polish children and to apply there the methods he had introduced in the establishment on Krochmalna Street.



Korczak's Teachings

The 1920s were a period of intensive and fruitful work in Korczak's life – he was in charge of two orphanages, where he also lived, served as an instructor at boarding schools and summer camps and as a lecturer at universities and seminaries, and wrote a great deal.

In the late 1920s, he was able to put into effect his long-time plan to establish a newspaper for children as a weekly added to the Jewish daily in the Polish language, Nasz Przeglad – it was written by children, who related their experiences and their deepest thoughts.

In the mid-1930s, Korczak's public career underwent a change. Following the death of the Polish dictator, Jozef Pilsudski, political power in the country came into the hands of radical right-wing and openly anti-Semitic circles. Korczak was removed from many of the positions in which he had been active, and he suffered great disappointment. As a result, he took a growing interest in the Zionist effort and in the Jewish community in Palestine.

Korczak with friends and children

He visited Palestine twice, in 1934 and 1936, showing particular interest in the state of education, especially the educational achievements of the kibbutz movement, but he was also deeply impressed by the changes he found in the Jews living there.

On the eve of World War II Korczak was considering moving to Palestine, but his idea failed to reach fruition.

From the very beginning of the war, Korczak took up activities among the Jews and Jewish children. At first he refused to acknowledge the German occupation and heed its rules, he refused to wear the Jewish yellow badge, and as a consequence spent some time in jail.

When, however, the economic situation took a sharp turn for the worse and the Jews of Warsaw were imprisoned in the ghetto, Korczak concentrated his efforts on the orphanage, seeking to provide the children there with food and the basics conditions of existence.

Feeding children in the Orphanage

He was now an elderly and tired man and could no longer keep track of the changes that were taking place in the world and in his immediate vicinity and he shut himself in.

The only thing that gave him the strength to carry on was the duty he felt to preserve and protect his orphanage, where old rules continued to apply, it was kept clean, the duty roster was observed, there were close relations between the staff and the children, an internal court of honour had jurisdiction over both children and teachers, every Sunday a general assembly was held, there were literary evenings and the children gave performances.

Polish friends of Dr. Korczak reported that they went to see him in the ghetto and offered him asylum on the Polish side, but he refused to abandon the children and possibly save himself.

Orphans tend a local garden

During the occupation and the period he spent in the ghetto, Korczak kept a diary. At the end of July 1942, when the deportations were at their height – about ten days before he, the orphans, and the staff of the orphanage, were taken to the Umschlagplatz – Korczak wrote the following entry:

"I feel so soft and warm in the bed – it will be hard for me to get up … but today is Sabbath – the day on which I weigh the children, before they have their breakfast. This, I think, is the first time that I am not eager to know their figures for the past week. They ought to gain weight – I have no idea why they were given raw carrots for supper last night."

On Thursday, August 6 1942 the Germans deported Korczak, his assistants and the two hundred children from the orphanage at 16 Sienna Street, the orphanage having been relocated from Krochmalna. A witness to the orphans' three mile march to the deportation train described the scene to the Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum as follows:

"This was not a march to the railway cars - this was an organised, wordless protest against the murder."

The children marched in rows of four, with Korczak leading them, looking straight ahead, and holding a child's hand on each side. A second column was led by Stefania Wilczynska, the third by Broniatowska, her children carrying blue knapsacks on their backs, and the fourth by Sternfeld, from the boarding school on Twarda Street." Nothing is known of their last journey to Treblinka, where they were all murdered by the Nazis.

After the war, associations bearing Korczak's name were formed in Poland, Israel, Germany and other countries, to keep his memory alive and to promote his message and his work. He became a legendary figure and UNESCO named him "Man of the Year."

Books, plays and films have all been produced about Korczak, and his own writings have been translated into many languages.

Korczak Memorial Stone at Treblinka – the only stone with an individual name

The Righteous Gentiles

Antonina and Jan Żabiński, featured in *The Zookkeeper's Wife*, were just two of the Righteous Gentiles who helped protect Jews during World War II. Here is how yadvashem.org describes the Righteous Gentiles":

The Righteous Among the Nations, honored by by Yad Vashem, are non-Jews who took great risks to save Jews during the Holocaust. Rescue took many forms and the Righteous came from different nations,

religions and walks of life. What they had in common was that they protected their Jewish neighbors at a time when hostility and indifference prevailed.

Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations

Primo Levi describes his rescuer, Lorenzo Perrone (If This Is A Man)
"I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence… that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole… for which it was worth surviving"

Attitudes towards the Jews during the Holocaust mostly ranged from indifference to hostility. The mainstream watched as their former neighbors were rounded up and killed; some collaborated with the perpetrators; many benefited from the expropriation of the Jews' property.

In a world of total moral collapse there was a small minority who mustered extraordinary courage to uphold human values. These were the Righteous Among the Nations. They stand in stark contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility that prevailed during the Holocaust. Contrary to the general trend, these rescuers regarded the Jews as fellow human beings who came within the bounds of their universe of obligation.

Most rescuers started off as bystanders. In many cases this happened when they were confronted with the deportation or the killing of the Jews. Some had stood by in the early stages of persecution, when the rights of Jews were restricted and their property confiscated, but there was a point when they decided to act, a boundary they were not willing to cross. Unlike others, they did not fall into a pattern of acquiescing to the escalating measures against the Jews.

In many cases it was the Jews who turned to the non-Jew for help. It was not only the rescuers who demonstrated resourcefulness and courage, but also the Jews who fought for their survival. Wolfgang Benz, who did extensive research on rescue of Jews during the Holocaust claims that when listening to rescue stories, the rescued persons may seem to be only objects for care and charity, however "the attempt to survive in illegality was before anything else a self-assertion and an act of Jewish resistance against the Nazi regime. Only few were successful in this resistance".

Faced with Jews knocking on their door, bystanders were faced with the need to make an instant decision. This was usually an instinctive human gesture, taken on the spur of the moment and only then to be followed by a moral choice. Often it was a gradual process, with the rescuers becoming increasingly involved in helping the persecuted Jews. Agreeing to hide someone during a raid or roundup - to provide shelter for a day or two until something else could be found – would evolve into a rescue that lasted months and years.

The price that rescuers had to pay for their action differed from one country to another. In Eastern Europe, the Germans executed not only the people who sheltered Jews, but their entire family as well.

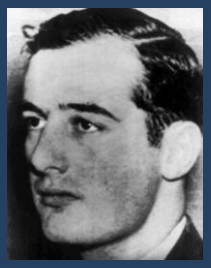
Notices warning the population against helping the Jews were posted everywhere. Generally speaking punishment was less severe in Western Europe, although there, too, the consequences could be formidable and some of the Righteous Among the Nations were incarcerated in camps and killed.

Moreover, seeing the brutal treatment of the Jews and the determination on the part of the perpetrators to hunt down every single Jew, people must have feared that they would suffer greatly if they attempted to help the persecuted. In consequence, rescuers and rescued lived under constant fear of being caught; there was always the danger of denunciation by neighbors or collaborators. This increased the risk and made it more difficult for ordinary people to defy the conventions and rules. Those who decided to shelter Jews had to sacrifice their normal lives and to embark upon a clandestine existence – often against the accepted norms of the society in which they lived, in fear of their neighbors and friends – and to accept a life ruled by dread of denunciation and capture.

Most rescuers were ordinary people. Some acted out of political, ideological or religious convictions; others were not idealists, but merely human beings who cared about the people around them. In many cases they never planned to become rescuers and were totally unprepared for the moment in which they had to make such a far-reaching decision. They were ordinary human beings, and it is precisely their humanity that touches us and should serve as a model. The Righteous are Christians from all denominations and churches, Muslims and agnostics; men and women of all ages; they come from all walks of life; highly educated people as well as illiterate peasants; public figures as well as people from society's margins; city dwellers and farmers from the remotest corners of Europe; university professors, teachers, physicians, clergy, nuns, diplomats, simple workers, servants, resistance fighters, policemen, peasants, fishermen, a zoo director, a circus owner, and many more.

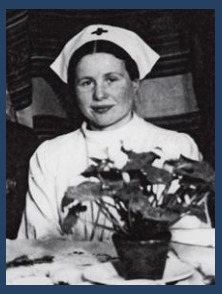
Scholars have attempted to trace the characteristics that these Righteous share and to identify who was more likely to extend help to the Jews or to a persecuted person. Some claim that the Righteous are a diverse group and the only common denominators are the humanity and courage they displayed by standing up for their moral principles. Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner defined the altruistic personality. By comparing and contrasting rescuers and bystanders during the Holocaust, they pointed out that those who intervened were distinguished by characteristics such as empathy and a sense of connection to others. Nehama Tec, who also studied many cases of Righteous, found a cluster of shared characteristics and conditions of separateness, individuality or marginality. The rescuers' independence enabled them to act against the accepted conventions and beliefs.

Righteous Among the Nations



Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish humanitarian who worked in Budapest during World War II, issued fake passports and housed several thousand Jews, saving an estimated 100,000 people from the Nazis. He rented 32 buildings in Budapest, and declared them to be protected by diplomatic immunity, hanging signs such as "The Swedish Library" and "The Swedish Research Institute". The buildings eventually housed almost 10,000 people, including Tom Lantos, the only Holocaust survivor to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. After the war, Wallenberg was captured and imprisoned by the Soviets, and died in prison in 1947.

Frank Foley, a British secret service agent, who, in his role as passport control officer, would bend rules when stamping passports and issuing visas, to allow Jews to escape "legally" to Britain or Palestine. Sometimes he went into internment camps to get Jews out, hiding them in his home, and helping them get forged passports.



Irena Sendler, a Polish Catholic social worker, helped save 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto by getting them false documents and hiding them in individual and group homes outside the ghetto. As a Social Welfare employee, she had a permit to enter the Warsaw Ghetto, to check for signs of typhus, which the Nazis feared would spread beyond the ghetto. She organized the smuggling out of Jewish children, carrying them in boxes, suitcases and trolleys.

Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz was a member of the Nazi party working as a special envoy to Nazi occupied Denmark. He made a secret visit to neutral Sweden, where he convinced the Prime Minister to allow Danish Jewish refugees to escape to Sweden. More than 6,000 Jews were ferried secretly to Sweden in boats, enabling around 99% of Denmark's Jews survived the Holocaust.

Hugh O'Flaherty was an Irish Catholic priest who used his protection by the Vatican to conceal 4,000 escapees – Allied soldiers and Jews – in flats, farms and convents. Along with the Catholic Church, he saved the majority of Jews in Rome.

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Bystanders were the rule, rescuers were the exception. However difficult and frightening, the fact that some found the courage to become rescuers demonstrates that some freedom of choice existed, and that saving Jews was not beyond the capacity of ordinary people throughout occupied Europe. The Righteous Among the Nations teach us that every person can make a difference.

There were different degrees of help: some people gave food to Jews, thrusting an apple into their pocket or leaving food where they would pass on their way to work. Others directed Jews to people who could help them; some sheltered Jews for one night and told them they would have to leave in the morning. Only few assumed the entire responsibility for the Jews' survival. It is mostly the last group that qualifies for the title of the Righteous Among the Nations.

The main forms of help extended by the Righteous Among the Nations:

***Hiding Jews in the rescuers' home or on their property**. In the rural areas in Eastern Europe hideouts or bunkers, as they were called, were dug under houses, cowsheds, barns, where the Jews would be concealed from sight. In addition to the threat of death that hung over the Jews' heads, physical conditions in such dark, cold, airless and crowded places over long periods of time were very hard to bear. The rescuers, whose lives were terrorized too, would undertake to provide food – not an easy feat for poor families in wartime – removing the excrements, and taking care of all their wards' needs. Jews were also hidden in attics, hideouts in the forest, and in any place that could provide shelter and concealment, such as a cemetery, sewers, animal cages in a zoo, etc. Sometimes the hiding Jews were presented as non-Jews, as relatives or adopted children. Jews were also hidden in apartments in cities, and children were placed in convents with the nuns concealing their true identity. In Western Europe Jews were mostly hidden in houses, farms or convents.*

***Providing false papers and false identities**. In order for Jews to assume the identity of non-Jews they needed false papers and assistance in establishing an existence under an assumed identity. Rescuers in this case would be forgers or officials who produced false documents, clergy who faked baptism certificates, and some foreign diplomats who issued visas or passports contrary to their country's instructions and policy. Diplomats in Budapest in late 1944 issued protective papers and hung their country's flags over whole buildings, so as to put Jews under their country's diplomatic immunity. Some German rescuers, like Oskar Schindler, used deceitful pretexts to protect their workers from deportation, claiming the Jews were required by the army for the war effort.*

***Smuggling and assisting Jews to escape.** Some rescuers helped Jews get out of a zone of special danger in order to escape to a less dangerous location. Smuggling Jews out of ghettos and prisons, helping them cross borders into unoccupied countries or into areas where the persecution was less intense, for example to neutral Switzerland, into Italian controlled parts where there were no deportations, or Hungary before the German occupation in March 1944.*

The rescue of children. Parents were faced with agonizing dilemmas to separate from their children and give them away in the hope of increasing their chances of survival. In some cases children who were left alone after their parents had been killed would be taken in by families or convents. In many cases it was individuals who decided to take in a child; in other cases and in some countries, especially Poland, Belgium, Holland and France, there were underground organizations that found homes for children, provided the necessary funds, food and medication, and made sure that the children were well cared for.

The Carnegie Shul extends special appreciation…

To Ellen and Michael Roteman, who are sponsoring Kiddush following Shabbas morning services, July 15, in memory of Michael's mother, Ruth Roteman, Rochel Leah, whose yahrtzeit is commemorated this week.

Yahrzeit Plaques

A wonderful way to commemorate loved ones is to dedicate a yahrzeit plaque in their memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, which are mounted on the walls of the sanctuary, are lit on the anniversary of a loved one's yahrzeit, on Yom Kippur, and on days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque in memory of a loved one, for only $175, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.

Each Shabbat, after services, we join together to make Kiddush and Hamotzi and to share a repast that often includes herring, lox, bagels, and desserts. Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush as an honorarium or a memoriam. The cost is only $36 and your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.