

The Profile of A Rescuer

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.

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.

The scope of the rescuing activities varied, from leaving food regularly by a ghetto fence, to hiding someone within one's house for several years, to creating a bureaucracy which allowed thousands of Jews to emigrate.

Rescuers possessed an inner core of unshakable values and beliefs. Social psychologist Dr. Eva Fogelman describes Hitler's twelve-year reign 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.