

Jewish Rescuer Citation

Presented in New York City, July 10, 2017

Walter Suskind

Walter Suskind (b. Luednenscheid, Germany 1906) was one of the many Jews who escaped to Holland after the Nazis rose to power. Having worked at a subsidiary of the Unilever multinational concern in Germany from 1928, he was hired as a manager at Unilever in Amsterdam – where he fled in 1938 - but lost his job when the Jewish-owned firm was aryanized as part of anti-Jewish laws imposed by the Nazis after they occupied Holland in May 1940. He was appointed by the Jewish Council (established in 1941 by German orders) as director of the detention camp for Jews established in the former Hollandsche Schouwburg theater before deportation via the Westerbork transit camp in northwest Holland to extermination in Sobibor and Auschwitz. Suskind agreed to take this position with the sole purpose of saving others and in this capacity he masterminded the rescue of some 1,000 Jews, placing himself in extreme danger. Conditions at the overcrowded theater were inhumane and, to keep the commotion down, children under 13 were separated from their parents. They were placed in a children's care center (crèche) located opposite the theater and operated by a team of Jewish caregivers. By some accounts, it was Suskind who schemed this separation of the children from the adults in the expectation that the ensuing disorder would indeed facilitate the rescue of the children. Taking great personal risks, Suskind together with the care center administrator Henriette Henriques Pimentel, and number of caregivers, among them Betty Oudkerk (18), Siney Kattenburg (19), Ines Cohn (18), nurse Virri Cohen (daughter of the Jewish council chairman) and Harry Cohen, smuggled 600-1,000 children out of the crèche into the hands of four Dutch underground organizations. With the assistance of Felix Halverstad - another Jewish employee at the theater – Suskind doctored the lists of internees and destroyed index cards, enabling the escape of many adults from the theater itself, even though the site was more strictly guarded than the care center. Together with Dr Edwin Sluzker, the formal head of the Jewish Council affiliate at the theater, Suskind distributed Council armbands to new arrivals, allowing them to escape and on at least two occasions disturbed these armbands on trams that brought internees from the theatre to the central train station for deportation. All his activities were undertaken in the utmost of secrecy and while maintaining a gregarious relationship with the German commander of the detention

camp, Ferdinand Aus der Funten to the degree that some Jews believed he collaborated with the Nazis. Eyewitness Gerte Weil said about him: “Suskind, of small physique, robust, with blond stubble hair and large blue eyes, was craft as Odysseus and eloquent as Achilles; Suskind, the rescuer, the hero, the gambler. He says yes; says no; selects and decides on life and death. He is the man responsible, makes the Germans drunk, falsifies lists, knows every trick, considers the situation anew, knows on which night it is possible, and he always succeeds.” Walter Suskind, his wife Hanna and their little daughter Yvonne were deported from Amsterdam in October 1944 (the city had been declared Judenrein over a year earlier on September 29, 1943) and they perished in Auschwitz in 1945. The citation will be presented to Walter Suskind’s closest living relative, his first cousin Bernie Suskind, who resides in Long Island but is unable to join us today.

Hadassah Bimko-Rosensaft

A French-trained dentist, Hadassah Bimko-Rosensaft (b. 1912, Sosnowiec, Poland) she returned to Poland in 1935 and was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in August 1943 along with her parents, first husband and five-year-old son. All of them were gassed upon arrive except for Hadassah who was sent to work details. She suffered hunger, disease and physical brutality. When the notorious chief camp physician Dr. Josef Mengele called on all imprisoned medical personnel to report for work in the Jewish infirmary, he assigned her to serve there as a doctor in the camp as there were already two dentists on staff. Hadassah and her colleagues tried various ways to prevent the sick and wounded internees from being sent to the gas chambers. With nearly no medical supplies she performed rudimentary surgeries on inmates, camouflaging their wounds and sending them out of the barracks on work detail in advance of selections so that when Mengele came to inspect he found no sick women. In November 1944, Hadassah and with eight other prisoners were sent as a medical team to Bergen-Belsen where she was appointed to establish a Jewish hospital in the midst of a typhus epidemic. Beginning with 49 Dutch children who arrived in the camp in December 1944, she organized what became known as a Kinderheim (a children’s home), within the concentration camp, gathering abandoned children arriving at the camp from all over Europe. Together with other women and with assistance from Jewish male inmates who worked in the SS food depot and pharmacy and endangered themselves daily to steal food and medicines for the children and convey it under barbed wire to Hadassah’s team,

she risked her life to ensure the survival of 149 children through the bitter winter and early spring of 1945. After liberation, when Bergen- Belsen became a displaced person's camp under British command, Haddasah headed a medical team that toiled to care for 17,000 sick survivors. In 1945 she testified at the first trial of Nazi war criminals and in 1947 was elected vice chairman of the Central Committee's Council, representing the Jewish communities throughout the British zone in Germany. Hadassah married Josef Rosensaft, the leader of the DP camp, in 1946. In 1958 they settled in New York and in 1978 Hadassah served on the inaugural US Commission on the Holocaust. She died in 1997. The citation will be presented to their son, Dr. Menachem Rosensaft, who was born in Bergen-Belsen in 1948.

Rabbi Zalman Schneerson

Rabbi Zalman Schneerson was a Lubavitcher rabbi born in Gomel, Belarus in 1889. He was persecuted at the hands of the Communist authorities and arrested several times and was allowed to leave the Soviet Union after his emigration requests were rebuffed sixteen times. Rabbi Schneerson spent the war years in France where he rescued over 100 Jewish children from across Europe in the south of France, all the while keeping adherence to Halacha. In a series of daring escapes, most of the children he cared for survived the Holocaust. He founded an association in Paris – the Union of Orthodox Jews (AIP) - to provide material relief to needy Jewish refugees and in the summer of 1940 moved to the south of France where he sheltered Jewish orphans. In October 1940 he moved to Marseilles where he established two institutions in the heart of the city: one for adult Jews in need and the other for children needing care and protection. From this base, he sent Kosher food parcels to observant Jews in French internment camps and extended aid to all needy people who came to his door. Directed by Leon Poliakov, who also served as the Rabbi's personal assistant and became a Holocaust historian after the war), the center housed a Yeshiva, knitting, sewing and dressmaking courses for women, and radio technology courses for young men. A charismatic figure, Schneerson developed a cordial relationship with the police chief in charge of foreigners in Marseilles- a move that later facilitated their escape from arrest. Later, Schneerson rented a big property in a wooded area outside Marseilles close to the hills on the Mediterranean to serve as the new home and school for the fugitive children. The facility operated until November 1942 and served as refuge for Jews escaping raids in the summer of that year. In November 1942, following the German takeover of the Vichy zone, Schneerson

moved his wards to a secluded farmhouse near the city of Demu. Due to increasing danger, Schneerson moved with his charges to the safety of the Italian zone in March 1943. After the fall of Mussolini in July 1943, Schneerson moved back to Nice only two days before the Germans occupied the city, forcing him to place the children in hiding in several of Nice's hotels with the help of Leon Poliakov. It took two weeks to smuggle everyone out of the hotels, with the Rabbi leaving last, hidden in a grocery truck under empty cardboard boxes. Once out of the city the children posed as vacationers hiking in the countryside. The children were divided into small groups and lodged in hamlets specially rented to accommodate them, with the rabbi's secretary, Fanny Vinograd-Orlowski, shuttling between them to provide food. Rabbi Schneerson was aided in his rescue efforts by his wife Sara and his daughter Hadassa who, at the age of 16, rose her bicycle throughout the countryside to deliver messages among the hiding places and obtain medicine for those who became ill. 18 of the children were nabbed in raids undertaken by French collaborators on March 23, 1944 and deported to Auschwitz; only one survived. The rabbi remained in hiding with several dozen wards until the end of the war in August 1944. After the war, he established a yeshiva in New York that combined Torah study with technology. He died in 1979. The citation for Rabbi Zalman Schneerson, Sara Schneerson will be presented to Hadassa Schneerson Carlbach, who herself will also receive a citation.

Ben Zion Kalb

Ben Zion Kalb was born in Strzyzow, Poland and fled to Slovakia shortly after the German invasion of Poland. Kalb rescued about 1,000 fellow Polish Jews, mainly infants, youngsters and teenagers, via a land route and a smuggling operation into Slovakia. His smuggling operation was first conceived to save his fiancée and later wife Clara. Kolb worked closely with Rabbi Chaim Michael Dov Weissmandl – head of the Working Group in Slovakia that was dedicated to the rescue of Jews - in rescuing Polish Jews, but disregarded his directive to place children only with Jewish families, believing that their survival was better assured in non-Jewish households – although he himself was observant. After the war, Ben Zion and Clara moved to the US where he ran a business manufacturing zipper-making machines. Between them, Ben Zion and Clara suffered great losses in the Holocaust: all four parents, six siblings, a sister-in-law and a nephew were killed. Ben Zion Kalb – who died in 1973 - kept copious notes and lists of his rescue

efforts. The citation will be presented to Kalb's son, Dr. Mark Colb of Boston, who inherited his father's collection and presented it to the U.S. Holocaust Museum.

Aaron Grunhut

Aaron Grunhut was an Orthodox businessman and a leader in several Jewish organizations in what is now Bratislava, Slovakia. He began his rescue activities in 1938, shortly after the Anschluss, when he participated in saving Jewish refugees from the area of Kittsee, a municipality in Austria, who were expelled to Hungary, and ensured their return to Slovakia. At the same time, he had a tent camp built for stateless Jews near Dunajská Streda and organized their journey to Mandatory Palestine. In 1939, he chartered two steam boats to smuggle 1,365 Jews from Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Austria from Bratislava via the Danube to the Bulgarian port of Ruse, then overland to Varna, Bulgaria and on to Mandatory Palestine. However, Bulgarian frontier guards stopped the steamboats and intended to send them back. They spent more than four weeks aboard in international waters. Finally, Grunhut persuaded Bulgarian offices to allow the ships to continue the voyage. Then, in the Romanian port Sulina, the refugees changed to the cargo ship Noemi Julia. After 83 distressful days filled with worries, the Jewish refugees arrived in Haifa—not before Grunhut arranged their legal entry into Mandatory Palestine. He returned to Slovakia and was arrested in 1943 by the Slovakian government due to his activity in the resistance. After his release, he joined his wife and young son who were hidden under a false identity in Hungary. From his hiding place, Grunhut contacted the Hungarian underground and financed the smuggling of Jewish refugees by train from Budapest to Damascus, saving another 300 children. The Hungarian secret police was after him and, with the assistance of a fireman (who was posthumously recognized as “Righteous Among the Nations”), he found refuge in the basement of the former Czechoslovakian embassy in Budapest, living in the premises with his wife and son until the end of the war. The family returned to Bratislava after the war, but with the rise of communism, the family left for Israel in 1948.