

Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum was the founder, director and leading spirit of the Underground Archives in the Warsaw Ghetto, also known as "Oneg Shabbat". The excerpt below is taken from his last letter, written on March 1st, 1944, and intended to be read by Jewish cultural figures in the free world. One week later, on March 7, the Gestapo discovered the underground hideout in the ghetto where he and his family were hiding. Dr. Ringelblum, his wife Jehudith, his son Uriah and thirty-five others, mostly intelligentsia, underwent terrible torture at the hands of the Germans, and were shot in the ruins of Warsaw.

”At the very moment when the Jews of Poland fell under the fearsome yoke of Hitlerism, the unceasing social activity of widespread, mutual self-aid began whose motto was support and struggle. With the considerable and active support of the Joint, a large network of welfare institutions was established, which was directed by the ZTOS, the Jewish Social Welfare Association, the CENTOS, Center for the Welfare of Orphans and Children, and TOS, the Society for Preservation and Health of the Jewish Population. Significant activity was developed also by ORT, the Association for Spreading Vocational Education Among Jews.

Tens of thousands of Jews, adults and children alike, managed to stay alive for a prolonged time only thanks to the support of these institutions and the ramified network of House-Committees which cooperated with them. These organizations persisted in their devoted work up to the very last moment, as long as the tiniest spark of life lasted in a Jewish community. Under their cover the clandestine activities of all political parties and movements could be continued. Also most of the cultural work was organized under their name. The motto of Jewish communal leadership was “to Live with Honor and to Die with Honor.”...

...Our cultural and social activist work did not cease even in the concentration camps of the SS, to which a part of Warsaw Jews, as well as Jews from other towns were taken. The activity did not stop, the group remained on the post of service to the public. In Poniatow, in Trawniki, and in other camps, a secret communal self-help was organized, and conducted from time to time, clandestine cultural and artistic productions, celebrations and the like. The spring of communal cultural activity would not dry up as long as any life pulsated in any grouping of Jews. You should know that the last surviving activists kept faith with our culture up to the very last minute. They kept aloft the banner of culture and struggle against barbarity to their last breath.”

One thing is very clear to me: we in the movement had an easier go of it than the others. Our lives had content; our existence had meaning. Each morning we knew what we were waking up to and for. We had work to do. I encountered former classmates, acquaintances and friends, who moved about like shadows. They had nothing to do, no task to perform. They were just trying to hang on; a book, a newspaper, an old newspaper, a moment of conversation. They were so lonely amid the hardships of ghetto life, the troubles at home, their families' isolation, the hostility, the hunger, the fear and the daily existential threat. We in the movement had a large extended family. In the event of any mishap, we knew that someone would be concerned and would ask, offer assistance, provide care and try to offer some relief. The most important thing, however, may have been that we were not constantly occupied with ourselves.

The transience of our unworkable ghetto lives made it impossible to plan anything. There was no systematic order to things. No day was similar to any other. When you set up a meeting, you did it with the lucid realization that it might not take place. We made sure to stay close, together and connected all the time. We spent every available moment together. Unless we were working, performing some task or carrying out some function, we gathered and grouped - not only to do things at some appointed time, but also just to be together. The strength, resolve and warmth that our togetherness created was like a balm for our souls...

...Before the war, we in *Hashomer Hatzair* had been the spearheads of the Zionist pioneering enterprise. We had raised ourselves and others in the doctrine of negation of the exile – the rejection of life and settlement in the Diaspora. We viewed *aliya*, immigration to Eretz Israel, as the true Jewish fulfillment, the one that aspires to Zion. Why, if so, had we not dropped everything and fled for our lives, or at least tried to flee eastward into the USSR, where we might find ways to Eretz Israel? Why had we not left the ghettos while we still could, and joined the partisans in the forests? Why did we choose to stay?

It was a choice – a knowing, conscious choice – not a necessity. We knew that we would not surmount and defeat the Germans in combat, let alone in the war. We understood clearly that our choice meant our death, sooner or later. Nevertheless, we chose not to turn our backs on our nation, the Jewish masses, but rather to stay with them...The task now was different, we knew. Our role had changed. Our eyes, though focused on Eretz Israel, turned to

the nation and stayed with it in exile. So long as the ghettos existed, we would be with the nation. We would not abandon it. We would defend it. We would be responsible for it.

Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka, "One of the Few"

Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka grew up in Grodno, Poland. She spent her teen years in the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement, which greatly influenced the course of her life. During the German occupation of Poland, Chasia enlisted in the combat resistance and was sent to Bialystok on its behalf. There, masquerading as a simple Polish girl, she became a liaison with the partisans, moving ammunition, medicines, food and information to the Bialystok forests. Together with other women colleagues, she also gathered intelligence about the positioning of German forces, enabling the Red Army to eventually conquer Bialystok without loss. After the war's end, she opened the first children's home of the Koordynacja for the Redemption of Jewish Children in Liberated Poland. For a year and a half, Chasia migrated with the children along the route of the Bricha to Germany, France, and then on the clandestine immigrants' ship Theodor Herzl to Eretz Israel. She stayed with the children during their half-year internment in Cyprus, and didn't leave them until they were settled in their new homes in Kibbutz Gan Shmuel.

Those evenings at the hospital are the only bearable memory of my Auschwitz days. We were nine friends, nine women of the same cultural and social background, with the same interests, the same enthusiasm, the same ideals. We knew what we were living for and we helped one another in our common fight. When we were hungry, we consoled ourselves by talking literature, quoting passages from the works we loved. When we were tired, when Mengele beat us – to break our spirit – we put our heads together and recited songs of freedom. We did not break... We could not break. We knew that thirty-two thousand helpless women needed us.

Sometimes we did not eat the food we earned during the day from our 'private' patients. We looked at the bread, the margarine, the wurst hungrily, but refrained from touching it, because one of us needed a pair of shoes, a piece of cloth. One time, I remember, I needed a pair of shoes very badly. But at the same time we were also very hungry. My eight companions were ready to do without the extra food, but day after day I made them eat whatever we received, saying that my shoes could wait...

We all loved one another, but Olga [Schwartz] and I meant more to each other than the others meant to us. We shared our cot, our food, our every thought. She protected me and I protected her. She was the only one who knew what I was doing when I sneaked out in the middle of the night to rid pregnant women of their babies and thereby save their lives. She knew, and she trembled for my life. "Take care of yourself..." she admonished me daily. "Don't give too much of yourself...You'll only wear out your heart..."

Olga was the best, the most wonderful human being I ever met.

Dr. Gisella Perl, "I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz"

Fredy Hirsch

"Fredy was one of the unique heroes of the Holocaust. Although he initially appeared as a young man with mainly physical talents, in the depths of the Shoah, at Auschwitz-Birkenau, he displayed maturity and leadership beyond his years. Because of him, hundreds of children were able to experience their last moments of happiness."

Yehudit Inbar, Director of the Museums Division, Yad Vashem

Born in Aachen, Germany in 1916, Fredy (Alfred) Hirsch was a member of the Young Maccabi youth movement. Following the promulgation of the race laws, he moved to Prague, where he became an admired sports instructor. Fredy was on one of the first transports to the Terezin ghetto in the winter of 1941. There he became deputy head of the youth department, devoting all his time to the children incarcerated in the ghetto. He worked tirelessly to keep the youth physically and mentally fit, emphasizing independent control of their bodies and minds. In the summer of 1943, some 1,200 children arrived in Terezin from the Bialystok ghetto. In accordance with SS orders, the children were kept in isolation. Wishing to make personal contact with them, Fredy violated the order. He was caught, and in September 1943 deported with some 5,000 men, women and children to Birkenau. On arrival, the entire transport was placed in the "Family Camp", believed to have been created by the Germans in anticipation of a visit from the Red Cross.

Fredy immediately recognized the urgent need to keep the hundreds of children occupied during the day, and managed to persuade the camp commander to allow them to use one of the barracks, Block 31, during the day

"Fredy forced the children to wash with the murky water of Birkenau, even on cold winter days, when six or eight of them had only one rag between them as a towel... Fredy made the rules: the children ate the daily soup in the barracks. The soup... was thicker and hotter than the soup the ordinary prisoners got, as well as the food supplements Fredy obtained for them – ersatz coffee with a little milk, noodles cooked in milk, white bread, a slice of cake, soup cooked from the contents of packages whose addressees had died in the meantime... These supplements came in tiny portions, and not every day, but that little bit added strength and joy.... Fredy forbade the counselors to even taste any of the children's food and punished offenders by ousting them from the children's barracks. The prohibition was usually adhered to even after Fredy's death... Fredy also forbade the counselors from accepting a gift of a spoon of thick soup from their charges.... During Fredy's time, the children exercised every morning under his instruction... Fredy forbade the counselors to talk to the children about death, about gas chambers and crematoria..."

The driving force in Fredy's life was his inner pride, his desire to serve as a personal example and to take responsibility for the lives of the children."

Ruth Bondy, "Trapped – Essays on the History of the Czech Jews, 1939-1943"

The Bielski Family Camp

“Don’t rush to fight and die...we need to save lives. It is more important to save Jews than to kill Germans.”

Tuvia Bielski

In late 1941, after the Germans had murdered masses of Jews in the Nowogródek area, including the parents of Tuvia, Zusia and Asael Bielski, the three brothers escaped to the nearby Naliboki forest where they set up a partisan unit. They sought to avenge the murdered and save other Jews. Over time, they were joined by other Jewish fugitives from the various ghettos and camps. By the summer of 1943, the Family Camp, under Tuvia Bielski’s command, grew to about 1,200 persons. The Camp was both a unit for fighting the Germans and a place of refuge. Tuvia, Zusia and most of the other members of the Camp survived. Asael, an officer in the Red Army, fell in battle against the Germans.

Riva Kantorowicz-Reich recollects: *“We heard that Bielski was looking for Jews. He had such a beautiful heart – he took everybody. Tuvia was simply collecting Jews. One day he sent people for us. Whenever he heard that a Jew was somewhere in need of protection, he would send his partisans to get them. He himself did not have too many weapons. He did more than he could, much more... [Tuvia] was marvelous! He was delighted with every Jew. Whoever came, he would hug and kiss and say, “Thank God I have another Jew.”*

Nechama Tec, “Resilience and Courage”

The Family Camp under Zorin’s Command

Shalom Zorin, from Minsk, fled the ghetto to the nearby Koidanovo forest after the mass murder of Minsk Jews on November 7, 1941. In the forest, he joined a partisan unit under the command of his Bielorussian friend, Ganzenko Semyon, and together they established a Jewish partisan battalion, composed mainly of those who had fled the Minsk Ghetto. Other than fighters, Zorin added to the unit individuals and families who sought refuge in the forest. At the end of 1943, Zorin’s unit, then operating in the Naliboki forest, numbered about 800 Jews, including 150 children, most of whom survived.

The Zionist Youth Movements' Underground in Hungary

With the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, the Zionist youth movements in Budapest decided to go underground and to pursue every possible avenue to save Jews. The underground smuggled 7,000-15,000 Jews into Romania ("The Tiyul") until the border became a front line in August 1944. It set up a workshop for forging documents, which were also used to release Jews from labor battalions and death marches to Austria. About 100,000 protective passes, "Schutzpasses", were made by the underground and distributed among Jews in Budapest. After the rise to power of the *Arrow Cross* in October 1944 and the renewal of the murders, the underground acquired 52 children's homes, supposedly under International Red Cross auspices. About 6,000 children and instructors lived there until liberation. From October 1944 to January 1945, the youth movements were, in effect, the alternative leadership.

"Owing to my knowledge of draftsmanship, I was added to the workshop team engaged in preparing forged documents...this was one of the most important and central branches of underground work. The activists often changed their names and places of residence, and this required an enormous quantity of documents. The false papers gave the members of the Zionist Youth Movements' Underground the freedom of action they needed to rescue others. We all devoted ourselves to saving Jews whose only hope lay in a piece of paper. We were a life raft for all those seeking rescuers."

From the testimony of David Gur, a member of *HaShomer HaTza'ir* and the Zionist Youth Movements' Underground

"In early November, an underground leader said to me: 'An aristocrat has given us a palace...Put the sign with the emblem of the International Red Cross on the gate. We'll print documents showing that the house is under Red Cross protection and we'll open a home for children there.' That night, I went there with a few lads. At three a.m., two vehicles drew up... bringing about 80 to 100 children. I was concerned that we'd die of hunger or freeze to death because nothing was prepared for us. The next day, trucks returned with blankets, food, more children and adults to look after them. In the end, about 300 persons were gathered there."

From the testimony of Yeshayahu Rosenblum, member of *Hanoar Hatzioni* and the Zionist Youth Movements' Underground

"The Tiyul, a project undertaken by two Jewish communities under occupation, Slovakia and Hungary, for the rescue of a third, the Polish, is a phenomenon that has no equal in the history of the Holocaust. The risks taken were enormous and the rescuers were aware that the enterprise's success would not earn them any direct benefit. Feelings of solidarity, sympathy and even compassion for the last remnant left in Poland impelled these activists to seek to save what could be saved." (Dr. Robert Rozett, Yad Vashem)

Healthcare in the Plonsk Ghetto

Jews in the Płońsk Ghetto established a healthcare system in response to the terrible conditions – overcrowding, hunger and cold – as well as the outbreak of typhus that broke out in the spring of 1941. A hospital was set up to care for the sick, administered by the only Jewish doctor in Płońsk, Dr. Eliyahu Fenigstein. The hospital was funded by the Jews of Płońsk, who also donated its equipment. It was a two-storey building with 40 beds and surrounded by a garden. At the height of the epidemic, patients were also cared for in the *beit midrash*. Dr. Fenigstein caught typhus and died at the end of June 1941.

In July 1941, the Judenrat chairman, Yaakov Ramek, recruited Dr. Arthur Ber from Warsaw to run the hospital. Dr. Ber also established a clinic and pharmacy in the ghetto.

The typhus epidemic led to the need for a lot of medicine. In order to reduce the cost, I set up my own pharmacy, in which Bronka Laska from Płock worked... we would buy all kinds of pills straight from Germany... apart from that I also prepared medicines... the prices of course were calculated right there, and the sale of medicines was not prevented by anyone's financial situation. We covered the cost of those who could not pay by those who could... this was an important achievement, for in other ghettos there were real problems acquiring medicine, so we also supplied medicines to other ghettos in the area.

Dr. Arthur Ber, *Sefer Płońsk*, p. 440

The Płońsk ghetto was used as a medical center for the Nowe Miasto (Yiddish, Neishtat), Sochocin and Cerwinsk ghettos. Dr. Ber traveled to these ghettos and brought back patients to Płońsk.

”For fifty years I carried the responsibility passed on to me by my father before he went to his death in Treblinka. He placed in my care a weak child of five, who looked more like a skinny little three year old. For three years I served as father and mother, guardian, protector, and mentor to my young brother, Yisrael Meir, or Lulek as we called him then. I feel it was this mission, the mission to bring this brother to safety from the abyss of despair to the gates of hope – to the Promised Land – and thereby guarantee the continuation of our rabbinic dynasty, that kept me alive and gave me the will to fight for our lives rather than succumb to the fate that befell so many of us.

On the first day of the new month of Adar, February 21, 1993 I stood at afternoon prayer with this younger brother at the Western Wall of the second Temple in Jerusalem. It was the same spot where we had stood forty-eight years earlier, on arrival in Jerusalem. Then, as a seven year old, he had gazed at the stones of the Western Wall without any appreciation or awareness of its significance. This time he was praying for divine guidance before assuming the highest post of any rabbi in Israel. My young brother, who had come forth from the ashes of the death camps, was shortly to be proclaimed Chief Rabbi of Israel. I looked at him with tears of pride and gratitude – and relief that my mission was at last fulfilled.”

Naphtali Lau-Lavie, “Balaam’s Prophecy”

“She described how my mother had died, of hunger and weakness, not long before the liberation. My mother had managed to survive for two and a half years of hell until her strength gave out. At Ravensbrück, the bride’s mother recalled, the other women of the camp were so fond of her that they did everything they could in order to save her. Every morning, they had to leave their bunks and march through the camp gate to go to work in the munitions factory. It was the sixth year of the war, and the women were starving, clothed in worn rags, barely dragging themselves through the winter snows. Whoever was unable to march to work was shot at the exit—the Nazis would not waste the one-hundred-gram daily bread ration on an inefficient worker.

My mother was no longer able to walk, and her friends realized that her fate was sealed. But they refused to give up, and instead found a creative solution. Every morning at dawn, sixteen women, all of whom were just slightly less weak than Mother, clustered into a knot, standing her in the center and supporting her with their arms and shoulders. In this manner they walked her through the camp gate. The Germans counted heads, but they did not check the legs. Mother’s head reached the height of the women encircling her, and so they did not notice her weakness. The bride’s mother was one of the women in that cluster who supported my mother’s body until her last moments.”

Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, “Out of the Depths”

I WILL BETRAY

I will betray, but tomorrow, not
today.
Pull out my fingernails today.
I won't betray.
You don't know the limits of my
courage.
I do.
You are five rough hands with rings.
On your feet are shoes with spikes.
I will betray tomorrow, not today.
Tomorrow.
I need the night to make up my
mind.
I need at least one night
to renounce my friends.
To give up bread and wine.
To betray life.
To die.
I'll betray tomorrow, not today.
The file is under the stone floor.
The file is not for the cell door.
The file is not for my executioner.
The file is to slit my wrist.
Today I have nothing more to say.
Tomorrow I'll betray.

Marianne
Cohn

Marianne Cohn was a member of a Jewish resistance group who was caught in May 1944 while smuggling children, aged 4-16, to Switzerland. Marianne was brutally tortured but did not give away her superiors' names. Her captors could not prove that she was Jewish because she carried forged papers in the name of Marianne Colin. In letters she sent from the prison in Annemasse, she expressed much concern for the children. In July 1944, Marianne was executed by the Germans. The children who were caught with her were saved thanks to the help of the mayor of Annemasse, Jean Deffaugt, and her colleagues from the Jewish resistance. The smuggling of children into Switzerland continued until spring 1944, reaching about 1,600 in number.

In the Words of the Survivors....

Dobka Freund-Waldhorn: “I was fortunate that I ended up in the elite group of Vilna [in the Torun camp]. There was Flora, older than I by ten years; she was an architect. She gave the tone to the entire group. Thanks to her we remained human beings...She was an example for us of how to behave. Most of us were fine women. We did not abuse each other. One of us had hidden some money – gold. She would give the Christian women we worked with the gold in exchange for bread. We divided it... We would talk, we would sing, often in Hebrew.... She would also make things, bags, handmade bags etc., then we would exchange them for food, which we also shared. I had an admirer among the men. He would throw me an apple from time to time, and we shared that. We would share everything. We did not quarrel.”

Nechama Tec, “Resilience and Courage”

Irena Lusky: “Right away, in Riga, we tried as much as we could to live a group life. Flora Roma was our leader... The minute she saw us, my sister and me, she said, “Come, be a part of my group, and I will protect you.” She knew our parents. She was in charge of a group of about ten women; it was fantastic. She was helping everybody. What she did, very few people could have done...Among other things she taught us. She arranged books for us and she kept up our spirits. She was much older than we were; she was married already. She was a very moral person. She always told us that we should never, never steal, that we must keep certain moral standards. She kept up our spirits, telling us that we would make it. She was trying to keep us always together. Even now, with her gone, we meet at least once a year.... When any of us had a birthday, we would see to it that the person got an extra slice of bread. Flora kept us going morally. We were also not lonely. We were together supporting each other.”

Nechama Tec, “Resilience and Courage”

Bracha Winger-Ghilai: “Within the camps, we created families among the prisoners. We called each other Camp Mother, Camp Sister, and we really acted upon it. It was very real to us. One day, a friend of mine from my town said to me, “Do you want to be my camp sister?” I said yes. From that day on, we were sisters. And that was accepted. That’s how it was. Everybody referred to us as sisters. When we arrived in Auschwitz, we were actually five, a group of five. The *Appel* was so arranged that in every row there had to be five. So we were five. Four were older than I was. One of them always supported me, watched over me, until this very day... She was like a mother to me. Even after I was liberated, she was like a mother.”

Nechama Tec, “Resilience and Courage”

Menachem Rubyn: “Somehow we had to support each other. This kept our spirits up. We saw that there was no meaning to the camp, to the killing, so whatever we could, we did, to help each other. I come from a family where my father was always ready to help other people. So this was a kind of a tradition for us, for our family, and maybe for me.”
Nechama Tec, “Resilience and Courage”

Richard Glazar: “My friend Karl Unger and I were always together. We were like twins. In this camp you could not survive an hour without someone supporting you and vice versa. We knew that we were destined to die... No individual could make it alone. Treblinka was a death camp, where people were brought to die. Here one had to be very cautious, very alert. One had to be always sensitive to signs of danger. We had to know which direction death might come from... I and my friend Karl survived because we supported each other constantly. We divided absolutely everything, even a small piece of bread.”
Nechama Tec, “Resilience and Courage”

"I lost all my family in Auschwitz. Not just my immediate family. No one's left. Not a single aunt, uncle, cousin. They're all gone. When I went to work in the kitchen, Jaco Razon was there. Jaco Razon was a Jew from Salonika. He was a boxer. He could go anywhere he wanted in the camp. Why? Because the camp Commander liked boxing. Every Sunday there was a match. Jaco Razon did many things. He would take a barrel of soup to the Muselmänner and distribute it. When I came in looking so emaciated, he took me under his wing. Jaco Razon saved me, and helped many other people who are still alive today."

From the testimony of **Yaacov (Jacki) Handeli**

"In Vienna there was a Zionist youth leader. His name was Aaron Mentscher and he set up a school to prepare students for emigration to Eretz Israel. Aaron Mentscher also started to organize groups of youngsters and escorted them all the way from Vienna to Palestine. His parents already lived in Palestine and asked him "Why are you going back? It's hell in Vienna now." He replied: "As long as students of mine are still in Vienna, I won't leave them."
Aaron Mentscher arrived on the same transport [to Theresienstadt]. We really looked up to him. He always gave us hope and boosted our morale. The whole time we were there, there were transports to Treblinka, Sobibor and Auschwitz. In the fall of 1943 they brought a group of children from Bialystok. The children didn't speak any language other than Yiddish. Aaron was one of the first who volunteered to take care of those children. After 2 or 3 months, they suddenly disappeared."

From the testimony of **Leo Luster**

(Aaron Mentscher and the children from Bialystok were deported to Auschwitz)

Below are the stories of but a few of the many Jewish individuals who worked to help and save fellow Jews during the Shoah

Moussa and Odette Abadi

Moussa, born in Damascus, and Odette, his fiancée, had fled in 1940, from Paris to Nice, in the South of France. The persecution of Jews in this area started after the fall of Italy to the Germans, in September 1943, which brought Nice and Cannes under German occupation as well.

Odette and Moussa started by picking up Jewish children whose parents had already been deported or were hidden. Once in their protection, they began to look for safe hiding places for them aided by the bishop of Nice, Bishop Raymond, who supported the Abadis in their rescue efforts and opened up Catholic institutions as well as allocating a small office for Moussa to produce forged ID cards and baptismal certificates.

Moussa Abadi also sought and received support from the Protestant (Quaker) ministers in the area as well as working with Jewish underground organizations such as the OSE and the MJS as well as the EIF. During the period of their illegal activity the “Marcel Network”, as they were called, saved the lives of 527 children.

Mila Racine

In the summer of 1943, Mila was given command of an underground group of the Zionist Youth Movement (MJS) in Saint Gervais in the Italian occupation zone. Mila helped hundreds of families and their children who had fled to the zone. She was part of an underground group that smuggled children into Switzerland. The last convoy she led included 30 children from the city of Nice. A German patrol arrested the group on the night of October 21, 1943 and imprisoned them in Annemasse. Mila was tortured but did not give away any information. She was deported to the Ravensbrück camp and from there to Mauthausen, where she was killed when the Allies bombed it on the eve of liberation.

Youra Livchitz

On April 19, 1943, resistance fighters from a Belgian underground group undertook independent action. The men; Youra Georges Livchitz, a Jewish doctor, Jean Franklemon and Robert Maistriau, stopped Transport No. 20, on its way from the Mechelen camp to Auschwitz carrying 1,631 Jews. With a flashlight and a pistol, Youra stopped the train. Maistriau opened the doors of one car, enabling 17 Jews to escape while the German guards opened fire. This was the only known attack ever carried out on a deportation train.

In 1944, the three were arrested. Jean and Robert survived the camps. Youra was executed in February 1944 in the Breendonk camp in Belgium.

Mirjam Waterman

When Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940, Jewish children were expelled from secular schools. Mirjam opened a Jewish school in her parents' home. In 1941 she learned about the German plan to deport Jews. She and her future husband Menachem Pinkhof could have hidden with Christian friends, but they decided that the Jewish youths had to be hidden as well. With the help of Joop Westerweel, the principal of the Kees Boeke school, and other Jewish and non-Jewish friends, they organized a resistance group. In 1944 Mirjam was arrested and deported to Bergen-Belsen.

Mirjam's resistance group saved over 300 Jewish youths. About 70 were smuggled through Spain to Palestine. Mirjam survived and emigrated to Palestine in 1946.

Walter Susskind

Walter, a thirty-nine year old former company director, was a member of the Jewish Council (Joodse Raad) in Amsterdam. As such he became a member of the *Expositur*, a department of the Jewish Council which was supposed to coordinate the deportation of Jews from the Netherlands with the German authorities.

Walter is especially well-known as the driving force behind the rescue of Jewish children from the round-up center. Across from the theater where Jews were awaiting deportation, there was a daycare center for children, the creche, where children under a certain age were being held prisoner. From this creche, Walter was able, with the help of a devoted staff and the cooperation of an SS watchman who himself was detected and died in a concentration camp, to spirit children away to hiding places. Dutch resistance organizations, many composed mainly of university students, would come to pick up the children, some in baby carriages or strollers, others in potato sacks, and take them to previously arranged hiding places in far away provinces, some to Limburg or Friesland, others less far away. Between 750-1000 children were saved this way.

Henni and Yehoshua Birnbaum

Henni and Yehoshua Birnbaum lived in the Westerbork camp with their six children for over four years, until February 1944, when they were put on a transport to Bergen Belsen. Shortly after their arrival in Westerbork, they were requested by the authorities to take responsibility for the orphanage there.

Hennie Birnbaum: "I felt like a mother for those children. Even more than that. I always thought: My children have a mother and a father, but these children have no one in the world that cares for them. My own children would ask how I could work until all hours of the night and I would say: "Maybe we can take one more child off the transport list, we have to keep trying." Sometimes I would return home early in the morning, but even then I couldn't go to sleep although my kids asked me to. I wanted to provide for the orphans going on transport, get them clothes and blankets. I remember well that there were very

cold winters while we were in Westerbork. Frau Birenhak (now Mrs. Pepi van Rijk-Keller) took care that the children had blankets, clothes, and much more. My husband and I did what we could. But many times we fell short."

Yehoshua Birnbaum: "Every week there were one or two transports. On each transport there were children. It was our job to find out which children were on the list to be deported. The administration knew but if you were discovered being in their office, you were meted out a punishment. Nevertheless, I always went in and looked at the list. My main object was to prevent children from being deported, using all the connections I had."

In Bergen Belsen there were many children from Westerbork for whom Yehoshua and Henni renewed their protective care. Although the circumstances there were much more severe, the Birnbaums persevered in their care for the children. The family with all its children stayed together and they survived the war.

Recha Freier

In the summer of 1932, Recha Freier, a Berlin rabbi's wife and social activist, was made aware of how antisemitism affected the lives of Jewish adolescents of Eastern European as well as German background. She decided the solution was to bring these youngsters to Palestine. Her vision and astute foresight was to develop into a substantial rescue operation for Jewish youth in the whole of Europe. Thus Recha Freier founded the *Aliyat Hanoar*, (Youth Aliyah).

Up until September 1939, the outbreak of WWII, some 5,000 youngsters had emigrated from Germany and neighboring countries to Palestine.

Recha Freier continued with her rescue work until the end of 1940, when it was no longer possible for Jews to get out of Germany. Daringly, at the end of 1940, Recha took a group of over 100 children, including her 11-year old daughter, on a rescue operation to Yugoslavia. With British certificates for Palestine, Recha left by train from Zagreb, reaching Palestine after a long and arduous journey.

Oswald Rufeisen

Oswald Rufeisen was born in 1921 in the town of Zadziele in the Krakow region. In November 1941 he came to Mir bearing false identity papers, and began working as a translator at the local police station. Rufeisen told the Jews in the Mir ghetto of the planned *aktions* against them, and smuggled weapons to the ghetto underground. Thanks to him some 200 Jews managed to escape from the ghetto to the forests and join the partisans. After the liquidation of the ghetto, Rufeisen's real identity was revealed and he was arrested. He managed to escape from the police station in Mir and hide from August 1942 until December 1943 in a monastery near the police headquarters, from where the hunt for him was still being conducted. During his stay at the monastery, Rufeisen decided to convert to Christianity. At the end of 1943 he left the monastery and joined the partisan unit in the Naliboki Forest. There he was suspected by Soviet partisans that he

had cooperated with the Nazis, but the escapees from Mir protected him and cleared his name.

After the war, Rufeisen joined the Carmelite Order and became a Catholic priest. He changed his name to "Brother Daniel." In 1958 he emigrated to Israel and joined the Stella Maris Monastery on Mount Carmel. From the moment he arrived in Israel he was adopted by the community of ex-Mir residents – especially the survivors – as one of their own.

Below are some of the many Jewish organizations that worked to help and save fellow Jews during the Shoah

The Jewish Scouts - Eclaireurs Israélites

The activity of the Eclaireurs Israélites - the French Jewish scouting organization founded by Robert Gamzon - was concentrated in the Vichy zone. The Scouts set up agricultural centers for teenagers, where they worked while studying about Judaism and Zionism. In late 1941, the Scouts were integrated into the *UGIF* (General Union of the Jews of France) and could thus also undertake clandestine activity without arousing suspicion. In November 1942, the organization went totally underground as *La Sixième* (“the Sixth Bureau”). Its members were involved in smuggling children and adults into Switzerland, in hiding Jews and providing forged documents. They also took part in the battles to liberate France.

The Zionist Youth Movement – Mouvement de la Jeunesse Sioniste

In December 1941, in Lyons, it was decided to establish a single organization that would incorporate all the Zionist youth movements in France. A meeting in Montpellier in May 1942 resolved to set up a clandestine underground that would supervise all focus on rescue activities. Movement members smuggled detainees out of camps in the southern zone and found hiding places for them. Their most important contribution was the production of high-quality false papers that could fool French gendarmes and the Gestapo men. In late 1942, the movement transferred its center of operations to Grenoble, in the Italian zone of occupation, where it could organize groups of children and smuggle them across the border into Switzerland. Many Movement members took part in the battles to liberate France.

The OSE - Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants

For many years the OSE provided health and welfare services, mainly to children. After the defeat of France, it shifted most of its operations to the Vichy-controlled southern zone, where it worked legally in the framework of the UGIF (General Union of the Jews

of France). Given responsibility for health matters, the OSE set up medical centers, assisted Jewish prisoners internees and their families, and worked to remove children from internment camps and send them to orphanages or foster families. After the mass roundups in the summer of 1942, it turned to underground activity, notably the concealment of a few thousand children. Its social workers, under the direction of Andrée Salomon, visited them and saw to their needs. The OSE also cooperated with other underground organizations to smuggle children into Switzerland

The Working Group - Slovakia

In the spring of 1942, the deportation of Slovakia's Jews to Poland began. In view of the deportations, a group of activists – *the Working Group* - organized an effort to stop them. The Group was headed by Gisi Fleischmann, one of the heads of the *Women's International Zionist Organization* there, and Michael Dov Weissmandel, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi, along with public figures from various streams – Zionists, Orthodox and assimilated Jews.

In its efforts to halt the deportations, *the Working Group* adopted a policy of bribing key officials in the Slovakian administration and the German representation. In the course of negotiations over the summer of 1942, the Group paid ransom money to Dieter Wisliceny, Eichmann's delegate in Slovakia. For various considerations, the deportations were halted in the autumn of 1942, but the *Working Group* believed this was a result of their bribes, and this encouraged them for the future.

The pause in the deportations convinced the *Working Group* that bribery was essential. As a result, Rabbi Weissmandel conceived the "Europa Plan," - the saving of European Jewry through the payment of ransom. The Group's negotiations with the SS on this matter lasted from November 1942 until August 1943. During this period, Group members contacted Jewish organizations in Europe as well as representatives of the Land of Israel, headquartered in Istanbul, in an effort to receive their agreement to the Plan and to mobilize the necessary funds. Despite their disappointment at the failure of the *Europa Plan*, the members of the *Working Group* did not relent in their efforts to save Jews. News about the murders in Poland induced them to track the fate of the deportees and to help those fleeing from Poland to Slovakia with hiding places and false papers. At the same time, they attempted to spread the information about the murders in the hope of thwarting the anticipated deportation of Hungarian Jewry. Their efforts failed and some of the members were arrested. At the end of 1944, their leaders, Rabbi Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann, were deported to Auschwitz.

The Jewish Army – L'Armée Juive

The initial core of the organization was created in June 1940, but the plan for the *Jewish Army's* underground activities was only formulated in January 1942. Its major objectives were to save Jews and to engage in an armed struggle against the Nazis. To implement the plan, the organization decided to cooperate with other Jewish undergrounds, and became a kind of umbrella organization called *Irgun Yehudi LaMa'avak* (The Jewish Organization for Combat). It aided undergrounds in weapons training, transferring funds from Switzerland and smuggling Jews to Spain. The smuggling operations into Spain through the Pyrenees began in mid-1943. The aim was to help young men get to North Africa and the Land of Israel where they could enlist in the Allied armies. In addition, older Jews and children were included in these cross-border convoys.

“We arrived here 24 hours ago. The group of 19 boys and 3 girls is already resting from the long journey ... We passed through many mountainous roads ... Please be sure that, in the future, the children will have good shoes, warm clothing, enough food, ... It was very difficult... We need to find either a different route or to have additional food to be able to do the crossing in the mountains over more days... I hope that our other colleagues (Haverim) will encounter fewer difficulties and that our experience will have served as a lesson.”

From a letter of Joseph Kruh “Croustillon”, representative of the Jewish Army in Spain, July 3, 1944

