There were heroes of every sort and condition, at every level of life—men and women who led nations, ordinary people who controlled only their own little homes.

Half a Million Schindlers

By CHARLES A. CERAMI

NOTHING LESS THAN A REVOLUTION in the way Jews and non-Jews think about each other—that is the potential product of a drive, in the making for several decades, under the leadership of Harold M. Schulweis, rabbi of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, Calif. It will inevitably evoke thoughts of “Schindler’s List,” but this research was far advanced long before that story emerged. This great movie is, in fact, just one more part of a much broader story with deep significance for the future.

I first heard Rabbi Schulweis speak at the Washington Hebrew Congregation on April 17, 1994, and later began corresponding with him. The rabbi’s original motivation was a desperate concern for his own children:

What am I to tell them? I’m supposed to teach them the basic Talmudic belief that God made man in his own image, that he breathed a living soul into the nostrils of each one. But they hear the facts: Two of every three Jews in Europe slain, one and a half million children killed because of their Jewishness. I have watched them, seated in a darkened room seeing the pictures of charred skeletons.

They sit in silence. What do the children think? What will they learn from this about human nature, God’s nature? Do I transmit my fears into their hearts, confirm the fatalism expressed by Cynthia Ozick, “The whole world wants us dead. The world has always wanted to wipe us out.” Is this the only legacy of Holocaust memories? Christians saw their Jesus killed on a cross, but they also remember all the great things that were then done in his name. Must I be like Yudka, in the short story “The Sermon”? He told a Kibbutz meeting, “If it were up to me, I would simply forbid teaching Jewish history. Class dismissed. Go out and play football.”

The theological crisis wrought by the Holocaust is radical. Not whether God is dead, but whether man is dead. Whether goodness is real or a fantasy, a human conceit. It brings to mind the judgment of Freud who concluded that people “view their neighbor in order to gratify their aggressiveness, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.” Is there a scintilla of promise to penetrate the depression? Not preaching. Not biblical quotations. Facts. Give me evidence.

And the Evidence Began.

A few decades ago, Rabbi Schulweis received a call from Jacob Gilat, an Israeli nuclear chemist studying at Berkeley. He little suspected the world Gilat was to illuminate for him. A Polish farmer named Alex Roslan (still living in Clearwater, Fla.) was sickened when he saw bodies of Jewish toddlers and teen-agers lying dead in a ghetto street. He came upon Jacob Gilat, then 10 years old, and two younger brothers, Shalom and David, apparently uncared for. With emotion overpowering caution, he smuggled the three young strangers out of the ghetto and hid them in his home. His wife Mila was terrified at what would become of their own two children if the boys were found. Hiding a Jew in Poland was a capital crime. Informants who turned in a Jew to the Nazis would
receive brandy, sugar and cigarettes. Twenty-five hundred Christian Poles were executed for helping Jews.

When Jacob Gilat and his brother Shalom contracted scarlet fever, they infected Alex’s own son Yurek. Yurek was sent to the hospital in Warsaw and, though only 10 years old, cunningly took notes on what the doctors did to cure him. He also hid half his medicine so his parents could take it home to the Jewish boys. It was not enough, and Alex sold his three-room apartment and took a smaller one to raise 100 zlotys to bribe a friendly doctor’s staff and smuggle the brothers into the hospital. One died. The other survived to become scientist Jacob Gilat. Now he was calling Schulweis because he wanted to introduce his savior to a rabbi.

“When I first met Alex Roslan,” says Harold Schulweis, “it was a strained encounter. My parents were Polish Jews whose memories were filled with anti-Semitic tales. But beside me stood Jacob Gilat as this Polish man’s witness. It was a moment of transformation. Alex Roslan became my friend.”

Rabbi Schulweis was not long in coming upon another amazing story. In San Francisco, he met a German, Hermann Grebe, who had been a railroad engineer in Ukraine and witnessed the slaughter of hundreds of Jewish men and women, their bodies dumped into a pit. He got the idea of requisitioning Jewish prisoners for a work detail on the railroad, then set up an underground escape route, pretending they were sent to a (fictitious) branch office in the city of Poltawa. During three years, Grebe spent all of his own money for food, clothing and forged identity papers for Jews, saving 348. When he died, Grebe’s family asked Schulweis to officiate at his funeral along with his Lutheran minister. “There in the church,” he says, “I met with dozens of the Jewish survivors who owed their lives to this German.”

At that point, in the early 1960’s, the rabbi began to address audiences of all kinds on this subject. At the end of many lectures, people came forward to tell him of their experiences with such rescuers. They set up a few of the rescuers, too. “Ordinary faces with extraordinary character,” he recalls. “But by and large, in most audiences I found a resistance to my message. What was my obsession with ‘them,’ they seemed to ask. How many of them were there anyway? Only a few hundred I knew of at that point. I had no inkling of the numbers of Rescuers involved (Schulweis capitalizes the R, to sanctify that word). For there has never been as great a systematic search as I still hope for—

not to this day. But even then, I felt that quantity should not be the measure of their greatness. The numbers game would trivialize it. In our Jewish tradition we are taught that for the sake of 36 righteous persons the world is sustained. And for the sake of 10 righteous persons Sodom and Gomorrah would not have been destroyed . . .”

Later, with the help of others the rabbi won to his cause, it was estimated that there were at least 50,000 non-Jewish Rescuers all over Europe, with the possibility that 10 times that many took part in acts that involved risk or consciously turned away from reporting or endangering the hidden Jews for personal reward.

Many who performed these feats were people with two-room or three-room apartments. Some of those took eight or ten people in for as long as necessary until a move could be arranged. There were a good many like Stefa Krakowska, a Polish peasant who hid 14 persons in her home, ranging from age 3 to age 60. A home in which a simple pail served as the toilet. Perhaps the most astonishing fact of all is that there were a at least 1,100 Rescuers in the very heart of Berlin! Many others—postmen, garbage collectors, shopkeepers, neighbors—must have known about each one and kept silent.

Why the Reluctance?

The most stubborn obstacle that Rabbi Schulweis faced in his long crusade is the reluctance of many to admit that good could have existed throughout those nightmare years. Why, he wonders. Did they feel that the identification of these Rescuers might somehow mitigate the dread of the Holocaust? Might it blur our remembrance of it? “I argue exactly to the contrary,” he insists. “If anything threatens our memory, it is the total 100 percent evil of it. It makes a Jew wish it were not so dark in his mind. It makes a Gentile feel guilty that this could have been allowed to happen. And nothing engenders forgetfulness so strongly as guilt feelings.”

“I am chagrined in speaking to Catholic audiences,” says Rabbi Schulweis, “to find that there is no awareness of their own heroes.” He mentions Archbishop Angelo Rotta, the Vatican’s nuncio in Budapest whose intervention saved thousands. He mentions Father Merci-Benoit, a Capuchin priest who ran a busy passport mill in Marseilles, helping to get Jews into Spain and Switzerland. He became known as Padre Benedetti and cherished the nickname “Father of the Jews.” And he adds, “Let the church celebrate its truest heroes and the synagogue publi-
cize their spirit. Jews need Christian heroes. Christians need Jewish heroes. For that heroism from the other side helps break down the vicious polarization.

But all of us, Jews and non-Jews, may find it hard to believe—evil has become more credible than good. Evil seems real, goodness chimerical. It is buried in anonymity, damned by faint praise. "Open to the section on Anne Frank in the Encyclopedia Judaica," says Rabbi Schulweis, "and you will find that the family of eight people was kept in a hiding place for two years. But by whom? There are just seven words: 'They were kept alive by friendly Gentiles.' But who were they? What happened to them after they were betrayed by informers and some were sent to Amersfoort concentration camp? What are their names? How is it that we and our children know the names of Klaus Barbie, Goebbels, Goering, Eichmann, Himmler, Hitler, but not the names of those who risked their lives to hide and protect the Frank family? Should they not be part of Jewish history?"

Two entire nations, in fact, deserve to be shining parts of Jewish history and human history.

Saying No to Hitler

The little that has been written about Bulgaria in this century dwelt chiefly on its backwardness and the corruption of its governments. Should not Jews and non-Jews alike know about Bishop Kiril and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church? When orders were given by the Nazis to deport all Jews from Bulgaria, the king and the Bulgarian Parliament were put under extreme pressure to comply. Bishop Kiril wired King Boris III and demanded that he resist the order. His soul stood in danger if he acquiesced, he was told. And in that case, the bishop and his parishioners would lay their bodies on the railway track, rather than allow trainloads of Jews to be carried off. An outcry from the Bulgarian people firmly supported the bishop. The Nazis did not want to risk a popular uprising, and Jews who had already been taken into custody were released. Ninety percent of Bulgarian Jews were saved. March 10 came to be known in Bulgaria as the day of the Jewish miracle.

In Finland, allied with Nazi Germany because it had been at war with the Soviet Union, were 3,000 Jews. But although Finland was forced into this military alliance, it had no intention of adopting Germany's anti-Semitism. Sensing what might come, Finnish intelligence penetrated Heinrich Himmler's apartment in Helsinki and photographed the contents of a portfolio that contained detailed plans for the "final solution" foreseen for Finland's Jews. When Himmler's demand finally came, the Finnish cabinet was forewarned and promptly declared, "We will not surrender our Jews." The Nazi pressure intensified, with threats intended to make the Finns see that their nation's existence might be at stake. But Foreign Minister Witting, firmer in the right than Himmler in his evil, said: "No. Finland is a decent nation. We would rather perish together with the Jews than give them up."

Ironically, a third nation appears among the heroes. Italy, the chief Axis partner of the Nazis. Why do the synagogue and the church not teach more about the heroism and altruism of Italian armies and the mass of the Italian people who combined to save 85 percent of the Jewish population, 40,000 Jewish lives that were sought by the German partners? A fanatic party controling much of Croatia proclaimed the liquidation of all Jews as its top priority. An Italian army under General Roatta was stationed in the southwestern half of Croatia, and thousands of Jews fleeing from the north sought refuge in the Italian zone. The general, having learned of the Jewish massacres, refused Germany's demand that he turn them over. The Germans pressured Mussolini, but his diplomas and his generals used delaying tactics to avoid the deportation.

Later, when the desperate Nazis tightened their occupation grip on Italy, they organized what came to be known as the Black Sabbath raid in Rome. They expected to catch 8,000 Jews in one sweep. But 7,000 had found hiding places among sympathetic Italian families. Thus most were saved. Wherever an Italian army was the occupying force, it sought to protect Jews from the Germans—in Yugoslavia, Greece, southern France and Albania.

There were heroes of every sort and condition, at every

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level of life—men and women who led nations, ordinary people who controlled only their own little homes; then there were many officials caught in between, sworn to obey orders, yet putting their sacred duty as human beings above the orders of any government.

Aristides de Sousa Mendes was the Portuguese consul general in Bordeaux, France. When refugees were fleeing occupied France, thousands tried to escape Nazi clutches by getting into Portugal. Mendes had his orders from Lisbon: No more visas were to be issued. But the consul heard from Rabbi Chayim Krieger about the imminent doom of the Jewish refugees. Without food or sleep, the consul and the rabbi sat up a full day and night stamping thousands of passports with Portuguese visas. Mendes told his staff: “Yes, this is against the orders of my government, but I cannot allow these people to die. Issue a visa to anyone who asks for it, even if he cannot pay.”

Mendes was recalled, investigated and dismissed with loss of all benefits. He and his large family became destitute, compelled to sell the ancient family estate in Cabanas de Virato. He died in 1954, forgotten and impoverished. But he had saved 10,000 Jews. Asked why he did it, Mendes replied: “If thousands of Jews can suffer because of one so-called Catholic [Hitler], surely one Catholic is permitted to suffer for so many Jews … I accept everything that has befallen me with love.” Rabbi Schulweis, who knows Mendes’ children, is determined to see that Rescuers who are still living will neither be forgotten nor allowed to die in poverty.

And from the other side of the world: Sempo Sugihara was Japan’s consul general in Lithuania, who in the summer of 1940 found himself in a situation much like that of Mendes. The Japanese Government ordered him to cease issuing visas. But when he saw Polish Jews with death staring them in the eyes, he could not obey. Sugihara granted 3,500 more transit visas, working feverishly with a yeshiva student for 12 consecutive days. “Whatever punishment may be imposed upon me, I know I should follow my conscience,” he said. On returning home, even though the war was over, he was summarily dismissed for his “neglect of instructions.”

He, too, died unknown and unheralded, having saved 3,500 Jews.

We cannot know how many such cases of heroic official disobedience there were, for some may have been pardoned by their governments and have never come to light. But it is sure, for example, that Paul Gruminger, a police commandant at St. Gallen, Switzerland, saved 3,000 Jews by putting false date stamps on refugees’ passports after a ban had gone into effect. He was dismissed from the service and convicted of insubordination and betrayal. The governments in some of these cases may not have been insensitive to refugee plight. Some of them were in a dangerous national situation, fearful of being invaded and occupied if they served as too great a refuge from the Nazis. But that only makes the country-wide heroism of Bulgaria, Finland and Italy all the more precious.

These examples are less than half the number usually mentioned in a single one of Rabbi Schulweis’ lectures, now heavily attended and met with tears and standing ovations. Many seem especially touched by the late Italian writer Primo Levi’s account of Lorenzo, the non-Jewish Italian civilian worker who brought him a piece of bread and part of his own ration every day for six months in Auschwitz. “I believe,” Levi wrote, “it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today. Not so much because of his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt and savage. Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man.”

There is still controversy—the old fear that Schulweis’ vision jeopardizes the memory of the six million dead. It’s like hushing the story of a heroic fire rescue, lest it spoil the lesson of how terrible a fire can be.

But the resistance to the rabbi’s revolutionary concept seems to be receding. No one asks now why he is “so obsessed” with this subject. And when he tells of a Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers that has been set up in New York City and is already granting special pensions to aged heroes who might otherwise be in need, many in the
audience come up to ask how they can contact the Foundation in order to help. Over 1,200 Rescuers in 24
countries are receiving grants, most being Christians, but
also including some Muslims.

In Israel there is now a special department in the
Holocaust Remembrance Authority. It is called Yad
Vashem—the Department of the Righteous. Persons who,
after very careful verification, are found to have helped
Jews at great peril to themselves are declared to be
"Righteous Among the Nations." At least two written
testimonials from those who were rescued or from other
Jewish eye witnesses must be received. No one can
nominate himself or herself, and there must be written
affirmation that no benefit was asked for or given. In addition to
a medal and certificate, each one formerly had a tree plant-
ed in his or her honor. But so great has been the number of
heroes, says Stanlee Stahl, head of the Jewish Foundation
for Christian Rescuers, that the avenue of trees no longer
has space for additions. Instead, new names are now being
placed on a Wall of Honor.

Yad Vashem’s director, Mordecai Paldiel, has written a
book in which he tells how he and his family were them-
selves saved from concentration camp by a Catholic
priest, Father Simon Gally, who hid the parents and five
children in his own home for days, then arranged for them
to be guided through a double barbed-wire fence into
Switzerland. That was in 1943. When Paldiel became
director of Israel’s Department for the Righteous, he tried
for six years to trace the anonymous priest who had saved
his family; and in 1988, he had the joy of presiding over a
moving ceremony, attended by religious and lay digni-
taries, to honor the retired Father Gally.

"Meeting them, getting to know some of the survivors,
has been for me a transforming experience," says Rabbi
Schulweis. "They have given me new heart and a pro-
found challenge to my Jewish conscience. They place a
mirror to my soul. Would I open that door? Would I hide
this pursued pregnant woman? Would I take care of her
needs at the risk of death?

"The most important mitzvah, or commandment, of
the post-Holocaust era should be hakarat hatov," he con-
cludes, "the recognition of goodness. Because this alone
can struggle against the curse that says, ‘We had no
friends, we have no friends, we will never have friends.’
That paralyzes our leadership. It kills the future. If all
you have is a hammer, then the whole world is full of
nails."

"We Jews have a double testimony to offer as we look
at our fellow human beings—the unspeakable capacity to
torture, to humiliate, to kill, and the divine capacity we
have now found to care, to protect, to rescue the innocent.
Remember the evil, and do not forget the good."
It is possible that even that summer the Schindler farm-machinery factory was in trouble, for it was geared to the manufacture of steam-driven tractors of a type already going out of style with farmers. Oskar was pouring a large part of his wages back into the business, and now with Emilie’s came a dowry of half a million Reichsmarks, an honest and alleviating lump of capital in anyone’s language. The suspicion of the gossips was unfounded, though, for that summer Oskar was infatuated. And since Emilie’s father would never find grounds to believe the boy would settle down and be a good husband, The famous Schindler’s List of Jews saved from the Nazi Holocaust during the World War Two is being offered up for private sale for £1.5 million. The list of 801 Jewish men, women and children, which belongs to the family of Oskar Schindler’s right-hand man, Itzhak Stern, is one of only five known to exist. Being sold through the website Momentsintime.com, the old and tattered manuscript dated from the 18/04/1945, is being handled on a first come first served basis. Buying history: One of the original Schindler’s List amongst other photographs in a Berlin newspaper office (file Half a Million. The Shins. Produced by James Mercer. Album Heartworms. Half a Million Lyrics. [Verse 1] I make myself a promise Then break it every night I’m feeling loose and life don’t make no sense I use my brains to build a fence ‘Round the claim I stake I take the drugs but the drugs won’t take. [Verse 2] I took a pledge to grow up Then drank enough to make me throw up On all my dearly disappointed friends I’m just too lazy to make amends With you anyway That’s why the pattern still remains. [Chorus] There’s half a million things that I’m supposed t half â€” l. noun (plural halves) Etymology: Middle English, from Old English healf; akin to Old High German halb Date: before 12th century 1. a. either of two equal parts that compose something; also a part approximately equal to one of these < halfâ€œl; â€œâ€œ New Collegiate Dictionary. Half-Life 2 â€” Cover art showing the series protagonist, Gordon Freeman Developer(s) Valve Corporation â€œâ€œ Wikipedia. Million Dollar Password â€” Genre Game show Created by FremantleMedia, based upon a format created by Bob Stewart for Goodson Todman â€œâ€œ Wikipedia. Half-Life2 â€” Half Life 2 Entwickler: Valve Software Ver Schindlerâ€™s Swiss-engineered elevators, escalators and moving walks keep the urban world moving, safely, comfortably and efficiently, 24/7 worldwide.Â Order intake increased by 4.1% to CHF 9 009 million an 24.10.2019. Schindler Holding AG: Organizational changes on the Group Executive Committee.Â In the first half of 2016, Schindler pursued its growth strategy while, at the same time, improving profitability. In spite of the softening of the global ne 16.08.2016.