



Teacher's Guide

**ALBANIAN
MUSLIM RESCUERS
DURING THE HOLOCAUST**

Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews During the Holocaust

An exhibition toured by Hebrew Union College, New York

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ISBN

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Cover: *The hands of Atlin Qeleshi holding a snapshot of Shalom Adixhes and her daughter Nina, a Jewish family rescued in Shkoder, Albania. Courtesy Eye Contact Foundation*

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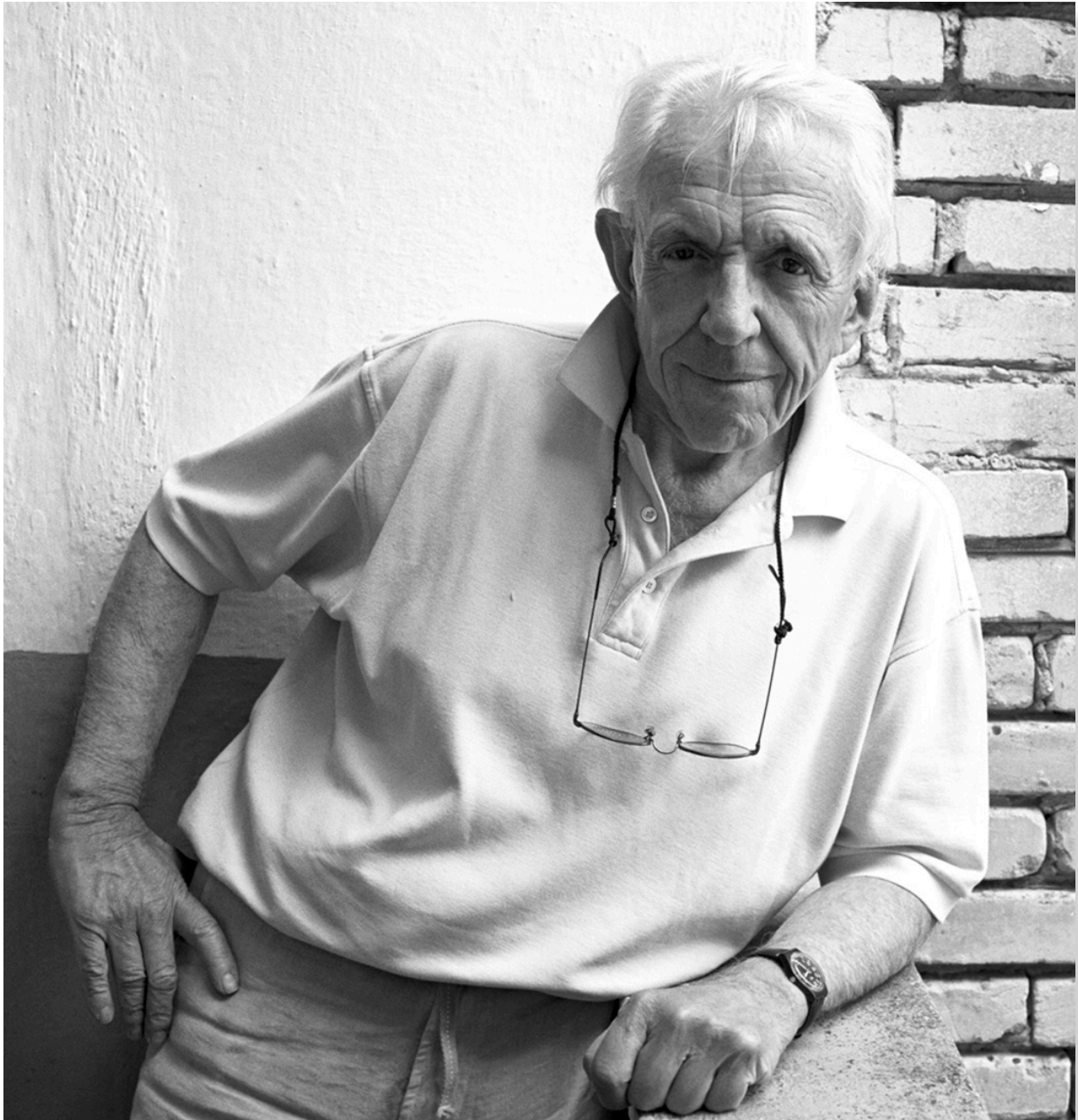
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
 Rescue During the Holocaust	
Pre-Visit Activity	6
Post-Visit Extensions	9
Support Material:	
Student Reading	11
Rescuer Profiles	13
Antisemitism & the Holocaust	16
Albania During the Holocaust	18
The Rescue of the Sarajevo Haggadah	20
 Map	 22
Timeline	23
Resources	26



Norman H. Gershman in Albania, 2005. – Eye Contact Foundation, courtesy of Stuart Huck

“There was no government conspiracy, no underground railroad, no organized resistance of any kind - only individual Albanians, acting alone, to save the lives of people whose lives were in immediate danger. My portraits of these people, and their stories, are meant to reflect their humanity, their dignity, their religious and moral convictions, and their quiet courage.”

- Norman H. Gershman

| INTRODUCTION

Acts of rescue were rare occurrences during the Holocaust. It is estimated that less than one-half of one percent of those under Nazi occupation helped Jews. In the Balkan country of Albania, with a pre-war Jewish population of only 200, acts of rescue contributed to the survival of 1,800 to 2,000 Jews, most of whom were refugees from other countries. The Albanian experience during the Holocaust reveals not only the determination of the Nazis to systematically annihilate European Jews, but also the possibilities that existed for resistance.

The stories of Albanian rescuers are relatively unknown due to the political isolation of the country under communism. Albanian rescuers were not acknowledged until 1987, when Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial museum, recognized them as "Righteous Among the Nations," a designation given to non-Jews who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Historians and Albanian archivists are currently working to research and document the Albanian experience during the Holocaust.

Albanian Muslim Rescuers During the Holocaust presents portraits and testimonies of Albanian Muslim rescuers and their descendants by American photographer Norman H. Gershman. Between 2003 and 2008, Gershman travelled through Albania and neighbouring Kosovo, gathering the stories of those who sheltered Jews. During interviews, when asked why they had rescued Jews, their resounding response was "Besa," which means "to keep the promise" and implies a responsibility to others in times of need.

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's school program and teacher's guide link the history of Albania during the Holocaust and the photographs of Muslim rescuers featured in the exhibit to the themes of social justice and human rights. This guide's pre-visit student readings and activity will prepare students for the VHEC-based school program, in which students will explore the topic of rescue during the Holocaust through an analysis of Gershman's portraits. A number of post-visit activities extend gallery learning back into the classroom, and expand on the theme of rescue - of human lives and of aspects of culture - during the Holocaust and other genocides.

The activities are accompanied by a timeline, glossary and list of recommended resources. Teachers are encouraged to adapt material to suit their needs, and to allow for a variety of responses and judgements among students confronting the complex ethical dilemmas associated with the topic of rescue.

Pre-Visit Videos

The following videos can be viewed by teachers as an introduction to the topic of rescue in Albania during the Holocaust and/or screened for students in advance of their visit to the VHEC:

“HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT”

This 10-minute CBS Sunday Morning News story follows Johanna Newmann, a German Jew who was rescued by an Albanian family, as she journeys back to Albania for a reunion with her rescuers.

www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=5577700n&tag=related;photovideo

INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN H. GERSHMAN

The photographer of the portraits in the exhibit speaks about his project to document the stories of Muslim Rescuers in Albania.

<http://www.eyecontactfoundation.org/Press/Video>

“GOD’S HOUSE”

A trailer for a feature-film in production about the remarkable stories of rescue captured by Gershman’s images.

<http://www.jwmprods.com/Productions/God-s-House>

RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

Objective

The actions of people who helped Jews during the Holocaust challenge us to ask: why do some individuals, in the darkest political times and under the threat of reprisal, choose to help those in need? By reading about the phenomenon of rescue during the Holocaust and considering specific acts of altruism, students will begin to consider factors that contribute to decision-making in times of moral crisis, a theme that will be developed during the VHEC school program.

Teacher Preparation

- **Optional:** To introduce students to the general concepts and chronology of the Holocaust, make copies and assign the reading *Antisemitism & the Holocaust* (p. 16–17) in advance of this activity.
- Make copies of the *Student Reading: Rescue During the Holocaust* (p. 11–12) for each student in the class.
- Copy one set of the six *Rescuer Profiles* (p. 13–15), ensuring that each group of students has one of the individuals profiled.

Activity (60 minutes)

- **Class Discussion** (5 minutes): Historians, sociologists and psychologists studying human behaviour during times of moral crisis such as the Holocaust often use the designations of *victim*, *perpetrator*, *bystander* and *rescuer*. More recently, the term *upstander* has been used to describe the actions of the latter group. As a class, brainstorm the definition of *upstander*. [Working definition for the teacher’s reference: *a person who chooses to take positive action in the face of injustice in society or in situations where individuals need assistance.*] Consider:

- What factors might influence a person to become an upstander?
- What character traits or personal experiences might be common to upstanders?
- In the history of the Holocaust, upstanders are very few in number. What factors might influence this infrequency of behaviour?

RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

- **Chart & Journal** (10 minutes): Students work independently to create an identity chart for someone they consider to be an upstander. Characteristics might include: gender, age, physical characteristics, cultural identifiers (ties to a particular religion, ethnicity, neighbourhood, school, nation, etc.) beliefs and actions. In a journal entry accompanying the chart, students record answers to the following questions:

- Why do you consider your individual to be an upstander?
- What motivated your upstander to act?
- What obstacles did your upstander face?

- **Pair & Share** (10 minutes): Students discuss their identity charts with a partner. Consider:

- What does the chart reveal about the upstander?
- How are the upstanders similar? Different?
- Identify 3 characteristics that you and your partner agree are common to upstanders.

- **Student Reading** (15 minutes): Assign students the task of reading [Student Reading: Rescue During the Holocaust](#) as preparation for the group activity. In a companion journal entry, students consider:

- What motivated rescuers to help those in need?
- What obstacles did rescuers face?
- What did you find most interesting about the reading?

- **Group Activity** (10 minutes): Students are divided into six groups. Each group creates an identity chart for one of the six rescuers featured in the [Rescuer Profiles](#) and answers the following questions:

- What action did the rescuer take?
- What motivated the rescuer to act?
- What obstacle did the rescuer face?
- What choices did they have? Try to think of at least three courses of action open to the rescuer.

RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

- *Class Discussion* (10 minutes): Groups share their findings with the class and discuss:



- Do the Holocaust rescuers share common identity traits?
- How do the Holocaust rescuers compare to the upstander in your identity chart?
- What do you think motivates some people to help others?
- What might prevent others from doing so?

- Inform students that each of the individuals profiled in the activity has received the designation of “Righteous Among the Nations,” given by Yad Vashem (Israel’s Holocaust memorial museum) to non-Jews who risked their lives on behalf of Jews during the Holocaust. Students will be learning more more about rescuers during their visit to the VHEC, in particular about Muslim rescuers in Albania.

NOTE: If time permits, assign students *Albania During the Holocaust* as a supplementary reading in advance of their visit to the VHEC.

RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

POST-VISIT EXTENSIONS

Select one or more of the following activities as a follow-up to your visit to the VHEC:

WRITTEN REFLECTION

Students compose a written reflection in response to touring the exhibit. Questions to consider:

- What was the most interesting thing you encountered during your visit?
- How did learning about Muslim rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust shape your understanding about the possibility of acting on behalf of those in need during a time of moral crisis? About such possibilities in your own life?
- Did your visit to the VHEC challenge or change your assumptions about rescue and/or Muslim-Jewish relations?

UPSTANDER PORTRAITS

Students research an upstander, either from your own community or who has done work nationally or internationally, that they admire. They create a portrait of their upstander - either photographic, painted or drawn - that includes objects and/or symbols that represent the individual's actions and character. Students write a companion text explaining the individual's actions. Create an exhibition of the portraits and, if possible, offer guided tours to other classes.

THE SARAJEVO HAGGADAH

Students read [The Rescue of the Sarajevo Haggadah](#) and consider the following questions in groups or as a class:

- Brainstorm books, art, historical sites and other aspects of culture that are important to your school, your city or a group that you identify with. Why are these things important? How would you feel if these things were vandalized or destroyed? How would you respond?
- What do you think the Sarajevo Haggadah meant to the local Jewish community? To Korkut?
- What were the risks associated with Korkut's actions? Why do you think Korkut thought it was important to protect the Haggadah despite these risks?

Raphael Lemkin, a legal scholar, first coined the term "genocide" in 1943. Lemkin formed the word by combining the Greek *genos* (race or tribe) with the Latin *cide* (to kill). Lemkin proposed the following definition for this new concept:

RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

POST-VISIT EXTENSIONS

“Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of individuals belonging to such groups.”

– Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, 1944

This definition was adopted as one of the legal bases for the Nuremberg trials, where Nazi leaders were tried by the international community following the Second World War. Discuss:

- Why do you think Lemkin included the destruction of culture, language and religion in his definition of genocide?
- Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not?

THE BYSTANDER EFFECT

Students read an article by young Canadian social justice activists, brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger:

www.thestar.com/News/article/196946

In the article, the Kielburgers cite studies that suggest: “A person is less likely to assist someone in need when other people are around. Ironically, the more witnesses there are, the less likely it is one will lend a hand.” Students write a response to this statement, drawing on instances from their own lives or from their studies that support or refute this premise. Consider: Do the case studies of Albanian upstanders support or challenge the Kielburgers’ assertions?

RWANDAN RESCUERS

After viewing Norman Gershman’s images of Albanian Muslim rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, consider Riccardo Gangale’s photographs of individuals who rescued Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide of 1994:

www.riccardogangale.com/#/content/02 Portfolio/03 Rwandan Rescuers/

Students write a paragraph in response to one of the images, using the following questions as prompts:

- Describe the photograph.
- What does the photo tell us about the individual?
- What question(s) do you have about the image and/or the people depicted?

For background information on the Rwandan genocide, see: www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1288230.stm

STUDENT READING: RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST



A “Righteous Among the Nations” certificate awarded to Dervish and Servet Korkut, Muslims who sheltered a Jewish girl in Sarajevo. The designation is given by the State of Israel to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. – Courtesy of Fitore Jaha

Acts of rescue were rare during the Holocaust. Less than one-half of one percent of those under Nazi occupation helped Jews. Why some people chose to help while others remained indifferent in the face of Nazi efforts to exterminate European Jewry challenges our most basic assumptions about human nature. Those who helped were not saints, but rather ordinary people capable of making ethical decisions and acting on them at a critical moment in time.

The obstacles to rescue were many. Fear was widespread in most of the countries under Nazi domination. In Poland, the Nazis made it clear that death was the punishment for any Gentile (non-Jew) who assisted Jews. To help a Jew meant risking the lives of one’s family, neighbours and fellow townspeople – a daunting prospect for the most heroic of individuals. Historical antisemitism (hatred of Jews), deeply rooted in Western culture, also played an important role in discouraging sympathy for the Jews.

Those that have studied rescue during the Holocaust have attempted to identify traits shared

by helpers or rescuers. Nechama Tec has characterized rescuers as having had a high level of individuality and a commitment to helping the needy. Samuel and Pearl Oliner have suggested that rescuers were more likely to have had close family relationships and a caring, non-authoritarian upbringing. Altruism - unselfish regard for the welfare of others - does not appear to be linked to factors such as age, sex, class, education or religion.

Individuals aided Jews in variety of ways. They helped by hiding Jews, falsifying documents and securing food and clothing. Yet, despite the helpers’ most valiant efforts, betrayal by suspicious or fearful neighbours was a constant threat.

Smuggling Jews into neutral countries generally required the concerted efforts of organized groups, or even a nation. Some helpers joined resistance groups or other underground organizations, but many acted independently. Some individuals, such as Oskar Schindler, are well known but most are known only to the individuals they rescued. In the case of Denmark, 90% of Jews were transported to neutral Sweden through a well-coordinated effort by the entire country.

| STUDENT READING: RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Churches and foreign diplomats were often permitted relative independence by the Nazis, putting them in the best position to help. As a result, many Jews were issued life saving visas and other safe passes or found asylum in churches, convents and orphanages. Geography, political climate and other external factors also played a role in the act of rescue. Jews found refuge more readily in the more sympathetic countries of Belgium, Denmark, Italy and Albania than in Poland, where the death penalty for helping a Jew was more severely enforced by the Nazis. In Bulgaria, where the government maintained some independence from Nazi control, widespread public protests involving key political and religious leaders forced the government to cancel plans to deport Bulgaria's 50,000 Jews.

It appears that most individuals did not seek out opportunities to rescue but responded when faced with desperate need or a direct request for help. Some rescuers may have been motivated by friendship with Jews, some by financial gain and others simply by moral or religious conviction. Most who helped are reluctant to acknowledge that what they did was in any way extraordinary or heroic. It is common for rescuers to assert that they only did what they had to, that it was their duty and that they simply could not have acted otherwise.

People's actions during the Holocaust challenge us to think about the responsibility of individuals, groups and nations today. The stories of rescue tell us something about the nature of human response during moral crisis and provide evidence that opportunities to fight injustice did and can exist.

Adapted from by "The Role of Rescuers" in Diplomat Rescuers and the Story of Feng Shan Ho, produced by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre in partnership with Visas For Life: The Righteous Diplomats and Manli Ho.

RESCUER PROFILES

Oskar Schindler



USHMM

Oskar Schindler, a Catholic German living in Czechoslovakia, joined the Nazi party in 1939. Following the German invasion of Poland, Schindler moved to Kraków and took over the operation of two formerly Jewish-owned enamelware factories. Through army contracts and the exploitation of cheap Jewish labour from the Kraków ghetto, he amassed a fortune. In 1942 and early 1943, the Germans began to kill and deport the ghetto's population. Several thousand Jews who survived the ghetto's liquidation were taken to Plaszów, a forced labour camp run by the sadistic SS commandant Amon Göth. Moved by the cruelties he witnessed, Schindler arranged to transfer his Jewish workers to barracks

at his factory, away from the brutality of the main camp. In late summer 1944, through negotiations and bribes from his war profits, Schindler secured permission to move his workers and other endangered Jews to Brännlitz near his hometown of Zwittau in Czechoslovakia. Each of these Jews was placed on "Schindler's list." Schindler and his workforce set up a phony munitions factory, which sustained them in relative safety until the war ended.

Miep Gies



www.annefrank.org

Miep Gies was born in 1909 in Vienna, Austria to a poor Christian family. In the 1930s she was employed by Otto Frank and would often speak of how strongly she disagreed with Nazi policy. When the Nazis invaded Amsterdam, Otto enlisted the help of four of his employees, including Miep Gies, to hide his family in an annex of one of his businesses. For two years, these protectors were the Frank family's only source of support, bringing them food and news. While in hiding, Otto's daughter, Anne Frank, kept a diary. In August 1944, the hidden family was betrayed by an anonymous phone call to the Nazis. After they were taken away, Gies went back to the annex and found Anne's diary, which she saved in

the hope of returning it to the family after the war. Of all those hiding in the annex, only Otto survived.

RESCUER PROFILES

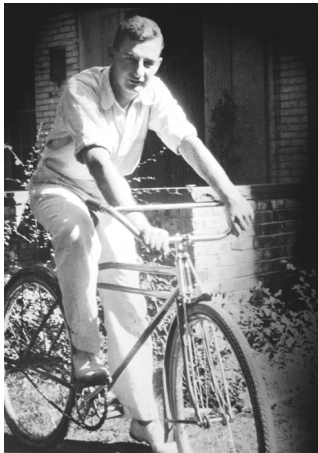
Chiune Sugihara



www.25-00387sempo/

Chiune Sugihara was born in January 1900 to a Japanese Samurai family which instilled in him a strict code of ethics, including values of love for family and children, internal strength and resourcefulness. Three weeks before all the consulates in Kovno, Lithuania were to be closed down in August 1940, Jewish representatives approached Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese Consul General, for help in obtaining Japanese transit visas. Though the Japanese government rejected the proposal, Sugihara decided to grant visas to Jewish refugees at the risk of his own career and personal safety. During the weeks before he was scheduled to leave, he issued at least sixteen hundred visas to Jews. Some of those rescued by Sugihara eventually moved to Vancouver.

Raoul Wallenberg



www.judiska-museet.a.se.net

Raoul Wallenberg was the son of a noted Swedish family who studied law in France and architecture and engineering in the United States. He met Jewish refugees while working in Palestine and his business partner was a Hungarian Jew whose family was stranded in Nazi-occupied Hungary. In the spring of 1944, Nazis began the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The Swedish Foreign Ministry, with the support of the American War Refugee Board sent Wallenberg to Budapest to help protect those Jews that remained. Wallenberg issued several hundred Swedish passports to Hungarian Jews and established Swedish “safe houses” where Jews could seek refuge in Hungary. His language skills and self-assured manner enabled him to remove persons from trains destined for Auschwitz.

Wallenberg was later arrested by the Soviets on suspicions of being a spy and disappeared in a Soviet prison. Wallenberg is honoured as one of the “Righteous Among the Nations,” and Canada has named Wallenberg an honorary citizen in recognition of his actions during the Holocaust.

RESCUER PROFILES

Village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon



USHMM

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a village in the mountains of south-central France, was the home of Protestants who had suffered persecution as a religious minority in Catholic France. The village's residents empathized with Jews as the people of the Old Testament and, under the leadership of their pastor and his wife, André and Magda Trocmé, felt it was their duty to help their "neighbours" in need. Five thousand persecuted Jews found refuge in Le Chambon, even though hiding Jews was punishable by death. The town's people hid Jews in their homes for up to four years providing them with forged identification and ration cards and helped them escape to safety in Switzerland. According to Magda Trocmé, "None of us thought we were heroes, we were just people trying to do our best."

The Family of Vesel and Fatima Veseli and their son Refik



USHMM

In 1942, Refik Veseli was a 17-year-old apprentice at a photo shop in Tirana, the capital of Albania. Moshe Mandil, a Jewish refugee, found a job at the same shop after fleeing to Albania with his wife and two children. After the Germans occupied Albania in 1943, it became increasingly unsafe for Jewish refugees to remain in the capital. Refik and his family decided to hide the Mandil family in their home in the remote mountain village of Kruja. The Veselis felt that, as Muslims, they had a moral obligation to help the Jewish refugees. Refik took the Mandil family on a difficult journey to the Veseli home that lasted several days. They traveled at night by mule, taking rocky secondary roads so that they would not have to pass through military checkpoints. During the day, they slept in caves and forests. When the Mandil family arrived, the two adults hid in a small room above the barn, while the children stayed with the Veseli children. Soon after, Refik's younger brother, Xhemel Veseli, brought another Jewish family of three to hide in the Veseli home. The Jewish families stayed with the Veselis until late 1944, when Albania was liberated. In 1987, Refik Veseli and his parents were the first Albanians to be recognized by the state of Israel as "Righteous Among the Nations." In 2004, Refik's brothers, Hamid and Xhemal, were also recognized with a "Righteous" title.

ANTISEMITISM & THE HOLOCAUST



The Boerneplatz synagogue in flames during *Kristallnacht*, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, November 10, 1938. - USHMM

Antisemitism means prejudice against or hatred of Jews. The term became widespread in the 1870s, but Christian antisemitism - intolerance for the Jewish religion - had existed in Europe for many centuries. Riots against Jewish populations were often sparked by false rumours that Jews used the blood of Christian children for religious rituals. At times, Jews were also blamed for everything from economic conditions to epidemics to natural disasters.

The Nazi party, which was founded in 1919 by Adolf Hitler, argued for the removal of all Jews from Germany. Nazism gained popularity, in part, by disseminating propaganda that blamed the Jews for Germany's loss in the First World

War and for the country's economic problems. This false accusation against Jews is particularly striking because Jews composed less than 1% of the German population when Hitler came to power in 1933 and were very integrated into German society.

Unlike Christian antisemitism, which was hatred of Jews based primarily on religion, Nazi antisemitism defined Jews as an undesirable "race." Drawing on eugenics, the Nazi party defined Jews as an "inferior" racial group, rather than a religious one, that threatened the purity of the "Aryan" race.

The Holocaust, the state-sponsored persecution and murder of European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945, is considered to be history's most extreme example of antisemitism. Following Hitler's rise to power in 1933, antisemitic policies were immediately adopted to isolate and dehumanize Germany's Jews. The first concentration camp was established at Dachau and Jews were removed from certain professions such as medicine, law, and education as well as from other community organizations. The "Nuremberg Laws" of 1935 denied German Jews citizenship and deprived them of most political rights. The laws also prohibited Jews from marrying persons of "German or German-related blood." As Nazi rule continued, harsher measures were implemented culminating in a statewide, government backed riot against the German Jewish community known as *Kristallnacht* or "The Night of the Broken Glass" in November 1938.

After the Second World War broke out in 1939, Jews in Germany and in other Nazi-occupied territories were sent to ghettos. This tactic served to further isolate the Jewish community and allowed the Nazis to confiscate Jewish property. As the Nazis occupied more of Europe, the number of Jews under their control increased. This prompted the Nazis to adopt drastic measures to deal with the so-called "Jewish Question." After the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, mobile killing squads were commissioned
(continued)

| ANTISEMITISM & THE HOLOCAUST

by the Nazis to murder entire Jewish communities. These squads were later replaced by death and concentration camps designed solely for the purposes of forced labour and institutionalized murder. By the time they were defeated in 1945, the Nazis had killed approximately 6 million Jews, two thirds of the Jewish population in Europe. Others deemed “inferior” by the Nazis, such as the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), Slavs, political opponents, and homosexuals, were also worked to death and murdered in concentration and death camps.

JEWS: People of Hebrew or Jewish decent. Someone who is either born into or converts to Judaism, the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish people.

NAZISM: The ideology of the Nazi party, which stressed nationalism, imperialism, anti-Communism, militarism, racism and antisemitism.

EUGENICS: A racial theory that was popular in many Western nations at the time. According to eugenics, observation, family genealogies and intelligence tests could be used to define which groups had “superior” or “inferior” qualities.

GHETTOS: Term used to describe city districts in which Jews were forced to live by the Nazis under miserable conditions.

SOVIET UNION: Term used to describe Russia under the communist government from 1922-1991.

ROMA AND SINTI: Roma (Gypsies) originated in India as a nomadic people and entered Europe between the eighth and tenth centuries. They were called “Gypsies” because Europeans mistakenly believed they came from Egypt. This minority is made up of distinct groups called “tribes” or “nations.” Most of the Roma in Germany and the countries occupied by Germany during the Second World War belonged to the Sinti and Roma groups.

SLAVS: Ethnic group of people inhabiting mainly eastern, southeastern and east central Europe, including Russians, Poles and Czechs, among others. Nazis considered Slavs to be an inferior race that was only suited for enslavement.

CONCENTRATION AND DEATH CAMPS: The Nazis established concentration camps shortly after assuming power in 1933 to imprison and isolate political opponents and those considered to be racially undesirable, such as Jews, and Sinti and Roma. Most of the approximately 1,800 camps were transit or labour camps. After the occupation of Poland, death or extermination camps were established for the purpose of mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek.

ALBANIA DURING THE HOLOCAUST



King Ahmed Zog (1895-1961), the ruler of Albania from 1925 to 1939. Prior to the Italian invasion, Zog issued Albanian passports to Jews fleeing persecution. – George Grantham Bain Collection

Jewish refugees began to travel to Albania during the 1930s as a result of Nazi persecution in Austria and Germany. The Albanian government assisted many Jewish refugees by providing Albanian visas and passports to some of those in need.

By April 1939, when Italy invaded Albania, there were approximately 400 Jewish refugees in Albania. These refugees were stranded in Albania because the Italians prevented Jews from leaving the country. They also forced them to move to the interior from coastal cities.

In 1941, Yugoslavia fell to the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) and the province of Kosovo was annexed to Albania to form Greater Albania. Jews in Kosovo faced a worse situation than those in Albania proper. Some were assisted by individuals or families in Kosovo. Some went to Albania proper, where Albanians assisted them. However, others were sent to jails in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

In 1943, Italy surrendered to the Allies and Nazi Germany occupied Greater Albania. *(continued)*

Besa: A Code of Honour

Albanian Muslims and Christians say they were motivated to take great personal risks to rescue Jews during the Second World War because of *Besa*. Meaning “to keep the promise,” *Besa* is a code of honour that holds a central place in Albanian culture. It is linked to an Albanian folk principle of taking responsibility for others in their time of need. According to one Albanian saying “Albanians would rather die than break *Besa*.”

The high survival rate of Jews has also been linked to other factors. The Nazis occupied Albania for a short time towards the end of the war and did not pursue the extermination of Jews as aggressively in Albania as they had in other countries. Albania’s mountainous geography may have also played an important role, as Jews could hide in rural areas that were difficult to access.

| ALBANIA DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Conditions immediately deteriorated for Jews. Between 281 and 400 Jews from Albania-annexed Kosovo were deported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

In Albania proper, hundreds of Jewish refugees from Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia lived in hiding. Nearly all of them survived the German occupation. In early 1944, when Jews in Tirana, the capital of Albania, were ordered to register with the Gestapo, Albanians helped them to obtain false papers or to hide in small villages. When the Nazis demanded a list of Jews from the Albanian government, it refused. While Albania had a native population of approximately 200 Jews, Albanians had rescued approximately 1,800 to 2,000 Jews by the end of the Second World War.

Islam in Albania

Islam was founded in the 7th century CE, when the prophet Muhammad began to receive revelations from God, called Allah by Muslims. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe that there is only one God. Muslims believe the message of Islam has previously been revealed at many times and places, including to Christians and Jews. The holy book of Islam is called the Koran and consists of the revelations passed on to Muhammad by Allah. It includes the stories of Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Islam is practiced by over one billion Muslims worldwide. These Muslims practice the religion in different ways, as they belong to diverse ethnic groups and religious sects. Islam came to Albania when the region became part of a Muslim empire called the Ottoman Empire in 1478. By 1912, when Albania successfully won independence from the Ottoman Empire, approximately 70% of the population was Muslim.

| THE RESCUE OF THE SARAJEVO HAGGADAH

The Jews of Albania were descended from Jewish refugees, known as Sephardic Jews, who had been expelled from Spain and Portugal during the 15th century. Sephardic Jews settled throughout the Balkan Peninsula in Southeastern Europe and built flourishing communities in the region. Many spoke Ladino, a language based on elements of Hebrew and Spanish.

In 1941, Nazi Germany began its conquest of the Balkan Peninsula after forming alliances with Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Germany invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, followed by Greece in June, and began to round up and deport Balkan Jews to concentration camps. By 1945, the majority of the region's Jewish population had been murdered, while major centres of Sephardic culture in cities like Sarajevo and Belgrade had been destroyed.

Thanks to the bravery of a number of individuals, however, a small percentage of Jewish people were rescued and aspects of Jewish heritage were saved. Dervis Korkut, the Chief Librarian at the Bosnian National Museum in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, was one such individual whose actions resulted in the preservation of an important Jewish text. Although he was an Islamic scholar, Korkut was proud of his country's diversity and loved studying its arts and literature, which had been influenced by many cultures. He disagreed with Nazi policies.

In early 1942, Nazi General Johann Fortner visited the Bosnian National Museum. Korkut was immediately concerned about the security of the Sarajevo Haggadah, an illustrated Jewish manuscript that was considered the library's greatest treasure. He was worried that the Nazis would destroy the Haggadah, as they had already done with other Jewish artefacts. Since entering Sarajevo in April 1941, the Nazis had ransacked the city's eight synagogues, destroyed ancient Torah scrolls, and confiscated the Sarajevo Pinkas, a historical record of the local Jewish community.

Risking his life, Korkut hid the Haggadah under his jacket as he acted as a translator for the Nazi General and the Museum Director. When Fortner asked for the Haggadah, Korkut lied, saying he had already given it to another Nazi officer. After Fortner left, Korkut took the book to his home and hid it in the mosque of a remote village.

While Korkut is celebrated for saving the Haggadah, he was also involved in another act of rescue. Soon after the Haggadah was taken to safety, Korkut brought a young Jewish girl to his home. She hid with the Korkut family until the end of the war. (*continued*)

THE RESCUE OF THE SARAJEVO HAGGADAH



The Sarajevo Haggadah. - Zemaljski Museum, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Hercegovina

A Haggadah is a Jewish text that includes biblical passages, prayers, hymns, and other religious literature. It is read during the Passover Seder, a ceremonial feast during which Jews commemorate the liberation of Jewish slaves in Egypt during biblical times. Beginning in the Middle Ages, many European Jewish communities created Haggadot that contained lavish illustrations. The Haggadot were decorated by generations of Jewish artists and became important texts for their respective communities. Thanks to Korkut's bravery, the Sarajevo Haggadah, which originates in 14th century Spain, survived the Holocaust. The decorated book contains 34 full-page illustrations of many subjects, ranging from the creation of the world to a Spanish synagogue. Today, it is displayed in the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina and is one of the oldest Sephardic Haggadot in the world.

MAP



TIMELINE

1492

Jews expelled from Spain during the Spanish inquisition. Some of those expelled settle in Albania.

1933

JANUARY 30

Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany by President von Hindenburg.

APRIL

Nazis begin to persecute Jews in Germany. The first state-directed boycott of Jewish shops and businesses takes place on April 1. Jews are excluded from Civil Service, medical professions and the Arts. Schools, universities and athletic clubs are Aryanized. Jewish children are denied access to public education.

1935

SEPTEMBER 15

“Nuremberg Laws,” anti-Jewish racial laws, enacted. Jews lose the right to German citizenship and to marry Aryans.

1938

MARCH 12-13

Austria is peacefully annexed (Anschluss) by Germany. All antisemitic decrees immediately apply to Austria.

NOVEMBER 9

Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). First state organized riot in Germany and Austria directed against Jews and Jewish business. Hundreds of synagogues destroyed and Jewish homes and shops looted. Nearly 30,000 Jewish men sent to concentration camps. Jews were later forced to pay for damages.

1938–1939

Conditions for Jews in Germany and Austria deteriorate after Kristallnacht. Hundreds of Jewish refugees flee to Albania.

1939

APRIL 7-15

Fascist Italy invades and annexes Albania. Jews are forbidden from leaving Albania and forced to move from coastal cities to the interior of the country. However, Jews are not persecuted as harshly as in Nazi-occupied countries.

SEPTEMBER 1

The Second World War begins. On the eve of the war, there are approximately 600 Jews in Albania. Two hundred are Albanian Jews, while 400 are refugees.

1941

APRIL

Yugoslavia falls to the Axis powers and is divided between Nazi Germany and its allies. The Yugoslavian region of Kosovo is annexed to Albania to create Greater Albania. Jews from the region are jailed in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

1942

JANUARY 20

Nazi leaders meet at the Wannsee Conference in a suburb of Berlin to discuss the “Final Solution,” the plan to murder all the Jews of Europe. The SS estimates that there are 200 Jews living in Albania.

1943

AUGUST

Italy surrenders to the Allied forces and loses control of Albania.

SEPTEMBER

Germany occupies Albania and installs a government led by a Regency of four Albanians. Between 281 and 400 Jews from Albania-annexed Kosovo are deported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

1944

Jews in Tirana, the capital, are ordered to register with the Gestapo (Nazi secret state police) order Jews in Tirana, the capital of Albania, to register with them. Some Jews flee to smaller villages, while others get false papers with the assistance of Albanians. The Gestapo also demands that the Albanian government turn over a list of Jews, but it refuses.

NOVEMBER

Germans evacuate Albania and a communist government comes into power. Albanians have saved 1,800 to 2,000 Jews. Albania falls behind the iron curtain. Few people are aware of the Albanians who saved Jews, until the 1987, when Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial museum, begins to recognize Albanian rescuers.

RESOURCES

Rescue in Albania

Gershman, Norman H. *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in World War II*. Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, 2008.

This companion book for the *Besa* exhibit features photographic portraits of Muslim rescuers and their descendants, along with rescuer testimonies.

Eye Contact Foundation

www.eycontactfoundation.org

The website for Norman Gershman's project provides background on his efforts to document Muslim rescuers in Albania. The "press" section features video interviews with Gershman and a Jewish woman whose family was sheltered by Albanians.

Hiding in Plain Sight. CBS Sunday Morning News Feature.

www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=5577700n&tag=related;photovideo

This 10-minute video provides an introduction to the role of Albania in saving Jews. During the Second World War. It features interviews with Deborah Dwork, a Holocaust historian, as well as Johanna Neumann, a Jew who was rescued by an Albanian family.

Rescue During the Holocaust

Among the Righteous by PBS

www.pbs.org/newshour/among-the-righteous/

This documentary explores the fate of Jewish people in North Africa and the deeds of Arab rescuers during the Holocaust. The website provides online access to the documentary, along with a timeline, rescuer profiles and other resources.

The Chambon Foundation

www.chambon.org

The Chambon Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to documenting and honoring the rescue efforts of the residents in and around Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, who risked their lives to shelter 5,000 Jews, many of them children, from the Nazis. Includes photographs, biographies, book excerpts, and links to related websites and online articles.

Flight and Rescue

www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/flight_rescue/

This online exhibition produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum features the story of some 2,100 Jewish refugees that fled war-torn Europe with the help of Jan Zwartendijk, a Dutch businessman, and Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat.

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation

www.raoulwallenberg.net/

A comprehensive website on the life and work of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat stationed in Budapest, Hungary during the Second World War who rescued tens of thousands of Jewish lives by issuing protective passports housing Jews. Features a listing of organizations and memorials dedicated to the memory of Raoul Wallenberg worldwide, news updates, a bibliography and collection of links, and biographical information about other rescuers during the Holocaust.

The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

www.jfr.org/

The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous is dedicated to honouring and supporting the surviving non-Jewish Holocaust rescuers. The educational section of the website includes downloadable teacher's guides that deal with rescue in Denmark and in Poland. The website also provides capsule biographies of a selection of rescuers and descriptions of the educational efforts and donation programs of the organization.

Polish Righteous: Those Who Risked Their Lives

www.savingjews.org/

Personal website that provides information about 5,600 non-Jewish Polish citizens who have been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem for their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust.

The Righteous Among The Nations Online Resource by Yad Vashem

www.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/index.html

This online resource by Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial museum, discusses the Righteous Among the Nations title, which is awarded to individuals for their efforts to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. The website includes profiles of featured rescuers and links to relevant educational resources.

Schindler and Vancouver's Schindler Jews - Teacher's Guide

www.vhec.org/teachersguides.html

The story of Schindler, a Sudeten-German industrialist and rescuer of 1,100 Jews, lends itself to key issues in the history of the Holocaust, most notably the theme of rescue. This VHEC teacher's guide presents strategies for integrating the topic of rescue during the Holocaust into the classroom and, by extension, for encouraging students to consider the individual and collective responsibilities of citizens today in responding to contemporary issues of injustice and racism. The resource includes five classroom lessons, each with a student reading and documents, as well as activities and discussion questions.

To Save a Life: Stories of Holocaust Rescue

www.humboldt.edu/~rescuers/

An online book by Ellen Land-Weber, a professor in the art department at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California. Based on interviews the author conducted with individuals who have been recognized by Yad Vashem in Israel as "Righteous Gentiles." Features rescuers' stories, photographs, and short biographies of Holocaust survivors and rescuers.

Visas for Life - An online exhibition by the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance

www.motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.aspx?c=hkLTJ8MUKvH&b=475889

This online exhibition by the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance on the rescue efforts of Chiune Sugihara, Japanese Consul to German-occupied Lithuania, who issued Japanese transit visas to as many as 6,000 Polish Jews.

General Holocaust Resources

Advance preparation will ensure that your students get the most out of their visit to the VHEC. In addition to doing the Pre-Visit Activity in this teacher's guide with your students, we encourage you to introduce general concepts, chronology and vocabulary of the Holocaust in advance of your visit. The following resources offer excellent support material about the Holocaust, and Canada's relationship to this history.

VHEC Holocaust Education Resource

www.vhec.org/teaching.html

This resource contains guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust, frequently asked questions, a timeline, a glossary, recommended readings and websites.

Open Hearts - Closed Doors: The War Orphans Project

www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/orphans/english/

RECOMMENDED FOR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS. AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

Following the Second World War, a group of young Jewish orphans immigrated to Canada from the devastation of Europe. *Open Hearts - Closed Doors: The War Orphans Project* is an online teaching exhibit that chronicles the lives of these orphans as they emerged from the events of the Holocaust into displaced person camps and eventually to new lives in Canada. This multimedia website uses the orphans' own words and artefacts as well as primary documents and photographs to provide students with a powerful learning experience about the Holocaust and the broader history of Canadian immigration during the 20th century.

The site provides extensive support for students and teachers in middle and secondary schools, social studies and language arts classrooms. The teacher's guide, web links, maps, biblio-videographies and pop-up glossary terms can be browsed online or downloaded as printable classroom materials. The bilingual site offers French teachers a valuable resource for Holocaust education.

Too Close to Home: Antisemitism & Fascism in Canada, 1930s–40s

www.vhec.org/teachersguides.html

RECOMMENDED FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS.

Too Close to Home: Anti Semitism & Fascism in Canada, 1930s-40s draws attention to a shameful part of Canadian history, a time when Nazi ideology and antisemitism permeated Canada's cultural and political landscape and was reflected in Canada's restrictive immigration policies.

This artefact folio provides secondary school students and teachers with primary source materials from Canada in the 1930s and 1940s. These materials paint a picture of the times and address the issues of antisemitism, Fascism, Nazism and immigration in Canada during the Holocaust, fostering student appreciation of how Canada's present-day diversity and multicultural identity evolved out of a more exclusionary past.