

Our Maverick El Salvadors

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THIS NOTE IS PLANNED TO BE PART OF BOOKLET ABOUT MY FAMILY.

Much of the following is based on references at the end of this section and in-depth conversations with Professor David Kranzler¹, a noted and dedicated historian of Holocaust era Jewish rescuers and an honest broker of history.

Beacons in the Dark

Dark, painful and fearful periods occasionally plague humanity. The Second World War was one such time. It led to horrible suffering and resulted in a major post-war restructuring of Europe. It also set the stage for the Cold War era, which could have triggered devastation on a much greater scale than World War II.

The war also had an inner darkness, pain within pain, terror within terror. This inner horror, the Shoah, was the genocide against us Jews and to a lesser degree against other groups. In retrospect, emergence of this Extreme Inner Darkness is not surprising; there were many large-scale genocides in the twentieth century even before the Shoah². The Jews' suffering during the Shoah is also not surprising. Thru almost two millennia incessant antisemitic campaigns by the church fertilized the ground of Europe with intense hatred for Jews and Judaism. The Nazis and Fascists found a fertile soil for antisemitism and were able to use that as a catalyst to amplify antisemitism to an unprecedented scale and violence.

¹ retired, City University of New York

² for example the Turkish genocide against Armenians

The puzzle is not the *Descent of Darkness* but *Illumination by Light*: lone individuals, generally brilliant and daring mavericks, who broke all rules when necessary and wrote new rules as they relentlessly improvised to save us. Some took phenomenal personal risks. Most had to struggle against their own establishment, including modern Jewish leadership in the free world and leaders of the then dominant Socialist-Zionist establishment. The mavericks often faced the forces of Darkness alone or with a small but fully trustworthy group dedicated to saving Jewish lives. Among Jews Rabbi Michael Be'er Weissmandl and Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann of the exemplary Bratislava "Working Group", "Peter Bergson"³, George Mantello (Mandel)⁴, Yitzchak and Recha Sternbruch⁵, and Rabbi Solomon Schoenfeld⁶ exemplify *Brilliant Light in Extreme Darkness*. There were many others.

Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat in Budapest who later tragically disappeared in the Soviet Gulag was perhaps an even more significant Beacon. He was in the same category as the above mavericks, was fearless and amazingly resourceful. His hero was Charlie Chaplin and in many ways he mixed humor with agile and non-conventional ways of thinking to outsmart the Nazis and save many of us, Jews, from their claws. Wallenberg was extremely daring and often risked his life for us under very difficult circumstances. He was not a Jew, yet he did all he could to save the Jews of Hungary. He was an exceptional man and a "mentch" of unusually high caliber.

It is said that no good deed goes unpunished. Immediately after Hungary's liberation Raoul Wallenberg was "repaid" for being an exemplary rescuer by being swallowed up in the Leftist Paradise on

³ Irgun representative sent to the USA from Palestine. His real name was *Hillel Kook*. In this note he is referred to under his alias or *nom de guerre*

⁴ Orthodox Jew born in Romania and represented El Salvador in Switzerland

⁵ Switzerland

⁶ England

Earth¹ Inquisition's concentration camps. He became its victim along with his Jewish driver from Hungary, Vilmos Langerfelder, and tens of millions in another large-scale genocide perpetrated during the blood and tear filled twentieth century². His tragic fate in the claws of the Soviet regime, in the hands of Hitler's one-time partner and co-war criminal, Stalin, is still unknown.

Many of the Jews of Hungary who survived and their descendents owe their lives to a number of mavericks, including Raoul Wallenberg, Rabbi Weissmandl and his "Working Group" colleagues, including Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann, as well as Peter Bergson and George Mantello. The Jewish maverick rescuers are still shunned by the modern Jewish and Zionist establishment in the free world, including the Holocaust Museums.

For various reasons the amazing, often daring and brilliant deeds of some Holocaust era Jewish mavericks who had great impact on saving Jews was not publicized by the Jewish and Zionist establishment. Every thinking person must ask how that happened – especially after the huge sums, energy and publicity poured into Holocaust museums, Holocaust education in Israel and world-wide. The answers to such a question are painful, but it is more painful and extremely damaging not to finally face the truth. The historical record also condemns Jewish and Zionist leadership during the Holocaust - not only for complacency but for persistent sabotage of rescue. Those leaders were never tried, whereas some low-level collaborators and kapos were tried or eliminated by Jewish vigilantes. It is mind boggling that some of the high-level saboteur leaders, including Nachum Goldman and Yitzchak Greenbaum were considered for Israel's presidency, and that Chaim Weitzmann became President. Moshe Sharett, one of the Zionists who apparently betrayed the envoy from Hungary (Joel Brandt) who tried to save the Jews of

¹ the CCCP and its Gulags

² seems that the Soviet system, including its colonies, murdered even more people than the Nazis and Fascists

Hungary reached a very high government position. The worst Zionist collaborator, Rezső Kasztner, was well rewarded in Palestine/Israel and became a prominent politician and editor of Israel's Hungarian language newspaper: *Uj Kelet*. To date there was no board of inquiry with mandate to seek and publicize the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about the role of Jewish and Zionist organizations and leadership in the Holocaust.

An earlier draft of this booklet included a section titled "*Darkness Among Us*" and was removed after much deliberation. This booklet is not the place to go into details about our own significant failings, for which large numbers of our brothers and sisters paid with their lives. It must be noted that whereas we are quick to call other nations and their leaders to task for not doing enough for us Jews during the Shoah, so far we deliberately failed to honestly examine our less than exemplary record and produced a distorted history. We must face history as it was, without whitewashing anything or anyone. We owe this to our murdered six million sisters and brothers, tens of millions of us who were unborn because the potential parents were murdered, and to ourselves. Without honest introspection we will not be able to learn from our tragic mistakes and wrong motives during a very tragic time. Perhaps we ought to take a lesson from our foundation document, the Torah, which presents our greatest people as having had weaknesses and downfalls which due to their stature they were able to overcome. We, the Jewish people, the State of Israel and leading Jewish and Zionist organizations³, should not settle for less regarding our failings during the Shoah. The magnitude of our magnificent accomplishments should give us the inner strength to face ourselves with integrity and without makeup.

Much can be written about the unselfish, heroic, humane, brilliant, creative and entrepreneurial character of the great maverick rescuers. Concern here is not for specific deeds, but the universal lesson, and the

³ like the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency

abstract character of *Beacons in the Dark*. It is puzzling that the periods of darkness¹ during the twentieth century in Armenia, the Soviet Union², Cambodia, Argentina³, Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia may have been so unlit by Beacons. There was a momentary glimmer of Light breaking thru the Darkness in latter day Communist China, when an anonymous, unarmed, lone young man stood in front of a long line of tanks next to Tiananmen Square on June 5, 1989 and stopped the tanks.

There is a need to teach young people the *Principles of Light in the Dark* to assure that periods of future extreme Darkness will be pierced, lit and dissipated by powerful Beacons. History shows that even if powerful forces of evil create widespread darkness sometimes even one person can light up the entire planet. Often it is the lone maverick who acts as a Beacon.

Some of the Most Important Rescuers

Rabbi Michael Be'er Weissmandl and Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann

One of the most remarkable geniuses of rescue during the Shoah was Rabbi Michael Be'er Weissmandl. He was born in Debrecen, Hungary and later was at the Slovak Nitra Yeshiva, where he married Rabbi Ungar's daughter. He was a multi-faceted genius. His grandfather asked him not to present his Bar-Mitzvah speech because it was of such high quality that he was afraid that success too early in life may have a bad effect. He was a renowned scholar in Judaism and in his spare time he developed the concept now well known as "Torah Codes".

¹ large-scale genocides

² during time of the Gulags and general Stalinist terror and genocide in the CCCP and its colonies, whose toll was apparently much higher than the number of people killed by Hitler's genocide

³ during time of the *desaparecidos*, when many young men and women "disappeared" after being tortured and murdered by the dictatorial regime

He helped found the war time Bratislava "Working Group", where he was the strategic planner and key activist aiming to save as many Jews as possible, without regard for affiliation and geographic location⁴. One of his colleagues in the Working Group was an exemplary and brave woman, Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann, who was unfortunately murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz.

In 1942 Rabbi Weissmandl realized that the Germans were willing to make a deal with what they perceived as a "world-wide Jewish power structure" controlling the world⁵. Rabbi Weissmandl invented a Swiss Jew, "Felix Roth", part of the German's imagined Jewish power structure. Fortunately Rabbi Weissmandl had stationery from an expensive Swiss hotel, from pre-war days, and on a suitable typewriter wrote a letter from a fictitious "Felix Roth" to himself, authorizing negotiation with the Nazis to save the lives of Slovak Jews. Rabbi Weissmandl conducted negotiations with the leading German Nazi in Slovakia, Wisliceny, first thru a Jewish traitor⁶ and then thru one of the trusted members of the Working Group, Andre Steiner⁷.

Rabbi Weissmandl was able to bribe the Nazis in Bratislava in 1942. They were willing to stop the transports from Slovakia for US \$50,000⁸. The Nazis showed good will by suspending the transports for a while, to

⁴ he also had unsatiable curiosity in many fields, was fascinated by all sorts of machines, and traveled widely to distant Jewish communities which was unusual at the time. He also traveled to Oxford a number of times to do research, which was very unusual for a "haredi" Jew in those times. In his "spare time" before or during World War II he founded the field now well known as "Torah Codes"

⁵ shows how propaganda can backfire. Often the chefs of non-kosher mind food end up eating their own slop as if it were gourmet food ...

⁶ who stole much of the ransom amount to be given to Wisliceny

⁷ Rabbi Weissmandl refused to cut his beard, despite being beaten up a number of times for being a Jew. He thought that it would be more effective if a "modern looking" Jew negotiated with the Nazis. I heard that later he regretted not negotiating directly

⁸ worth about \$500,000 today

give the Working Group credibility and time to raise the money. Repeated pleas for money by the Working Group to various parts of the Jewish establishment, particularly the JOINT and HEHALUTZ, were futile. Since the money was not forthcoming eventually the Nazis resumed the transports.

Later in 1942 Rabbi Weissmandl was again able to negotiate with the Nazis, who agreed to stop almost all transports in Europe for two million dollars¹. This was called the *Europa Plan*. Only a small down payment of about 10% was required to show the Nazis good faith. Once again the modern Jewish establishment refused to help. The results we know: six million of our brothers and sisters murdered, six million worlds destroyed and untold suffering by eventual survivors.

Rabbi Weissmandl was also instrumental in the drafting of what became known as the “*Auschwitz Report*”, based on testimony of two Jews who escaped from Auschwitz², Walter Rosenberg³ and Alfred Wetzler, to warn of the imminent murder of Hungarian Jews⁴. This was around April 7, 1944 soon after the Germans entered Hungary and deported about 12,000 Jews a day to Auschwitz. The escapees were extensively questioned by members of the Bratislava Working Group and their testimony and maps of Auschwitz they had memorized formed the basis of the *Auschwitz Report*⁵. Rabbi Weissmandl’s Yiddish summary of the report was widely distributed to major Jewish/Zionist organizations in the

¹ in today’s terms about twenty-million dollars

² the escape was organized by the underground in Auschwitz to warn of the Nazis’ plan to murder the Jews of Hungary

³ changed his name to Rudolph Vrba

⁴ later, on May 27, 1944, two more Jews escaped: Ernest Rosin (Slovak) and Ceslov Mordowitz (Polish) and were also debriefed by a member(s) of the Working Group

⁵ a noted and reliable historian said that as recently as the 1970-s over 10 copies, some variants, of the *Auschwitz Report* were in the Sochnut archives, but recently he couldn’t find any copies.

free world. Eventually a copy reached George Mantello (Mandel) in Switzerland, who obtained it via the Orthodox community in Budapest. Mantello used the report to widely publicize the Nazi atrocities and that stopped the trains from Hungary. See later section on George Mantello.

Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann was able to send her children to Palestine, but declined to leave Bratislava, saying that her place and fate was with her other children: the abandoned Jews of Slovakia. She was Rabbi Weissmandl’s relative, wasn’t religious, and was by profession a social worker at WIZO. Because of her dedication to rescue the Nazis requested “special treatment” for Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann when she was sent to Auschwitz. This meant that she was probably murdered immediately upon arrival. It is gratifying that at least a small Jerusalem alley is named after Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann⁶. The other Jewish rescuers received no recognition in Israel or by Yad Vashem - as far as it is known. There is also a small Jerusalem street named after Raoul Wallenberg.

During the Shoah Mrs. Fleischmann, Rabbi Weissmandl and others in the Working Group worked tirelessly and selflessly to save Jews without concern for their religious or political preferences. In Bratislava religious and irreligious, Zionist and non-Zionist, assimilated and non-assimilated Jews worked together in harmony. Unfortunately that seemed to be not the case in Budapest and elsewhere⁷ during an extremely critical time for us.

Rabbi Weissmandl was also to be accorded by the Nazis “special treatment”, but he was able to saw thru a lock on the train taking him and his family to Auschwitz, jumped off the train and survived. His family, unfortunately, was murdered. Rabbi Weissmandl was a broken man after this and often cried every night because of his personal tragedy

⁶ in the Ramot Beth neighborhood, called Rechoy Giza, off Rechoy Even Shmuel

⁷ including the Yishuv in pre-state Israel, the USA and the Warsaw Ghetto during the revolt

and due to his knowledge that more could have been done to save the Jews of Europe. After the war he lived in the USA where he rebuilt the Nitra yeshiva which he set up in the then secluded Westchester town of Mount Kisco in New York state. After much deliberation he wrote a book called *Min Ha Metzar*¹ about what happened during the Shoah and the book was apparently banned in Israel. He died shortly after writing the book, some say from a broken heart.

The Bratislava Working Group also included the following people²:

Rabbi Armin Frieder, a religious Zionist, escaped from a deportation train at the very end of the war. He passed away in Bratislava in 1946, after a banal gall-bladder operation

Willy Furst, the treasurer of the Working Group, was caught in the autumn of 1944, after leaving his bunker to help other Jews. Nothing is known about his subsequent fate

Tibor Kovac, who never wanted to be Jewish, survived the war in the underground. He remained in Slovakia. In 1952, during the Communist trials with so-called "Zionist Conspiracy Center", he committed suicide

Oskar Neumann, a Slovak Zionist leader, saw the end of the war in Theresienstadt. He then moved to Israel, to build a new homeland

Andrej Steiner, the architect of Slovak labor camps and was the Working Group's main contact to SS hauptsturmführer Wisliceny. Has saved by peasants in the Carpathian mountains after the uprising against

the Nazis. He is the last living member of the Working Group (living in the USA)

Also associated with the Working Group were

Emanuel Frieder, after the liberation a Jewish functionaries, involved in the *Bricha* movement from Hungary. Arrested in 1949, emigrated to Israel upon release

Juraj Revesz, during WWII also cooperated with Rudolf Kasztner and the International Red Cross. After the liberation was director of the JOINT in Slovakia. Arrested in 1949 and after release escaped to Israel

Samu Stern, a currency dealer, provided \$50,000 to bribe Wisliceny to stop the transports from Slovakia

Peter Bergson (Hillel Kook)

One ardent Zionist³, Peter Bergson, a high ranking member of the Irgun, worked tirelessly and very effectively in the United States to try to save the Jews of Europe. His real name was Hillel Kook, which he changed to Peter Bergson out of concern for his well known uncle, Rabbi Kook, the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, whom he didn't want to embarrass with his political activities⁴.

Bergson was sent from Palestine to Europe and after the war broke out to America to help establish a Jewish Army. He was young, maybe 25. Although he was an ardent Zionist he realized that during the Shoah there is an even more important mission than Zionism⁵: saving the lives of his

¹ *"From the Straights"*, written in the late 1950-s or early 1960-s after much deliberation. Rabbi Weissmandl felt that in order to learn important lessons it is important to understand certain aspects of the Shoah we may prefer to ignore. He decided to publish it only in Hebrew, intending the book for a Jewish audience

² text from Web site www.verafilm.cz, set up by Mr. Petr Bok and Mr. Martin Smok in Prague - producers of a three hour documentary, "Among Blind Fools", about Rabbi Weissmandl and the Working Group.

³ a "Revisionist" - follower of Jabotinsky - in the Etzel group

⁴ Hillel Kook was not an observant Jew

⁵ in contrast, a leading Socialist-Zionist, signer of Israel's Declaration of Independence, and Mapai party nominee for President, Yitzchak Greenbaum, a leader of HEHALUTZ (represented in Hungary by Dr Rezső Kasztner), said *"Zionism is above everything!"* – i.e. above rescue. He also said that diverting funds for rescue is an anti-Zionist act

brothers and sisters in Europe from what appeared to be certain death. He dedicated himself to organizing various efforts to make Americans aware of what was happening in Europe, and putting pressure on American politicians. Starting in Spring 1943 the small, but very dedicated and talented group he led placed full page ads in major newspapers, including the New York Times. He organized a major public demonstration, the “*Rabbis’ March*”¹ in Washington, DC, to call attention to our plight.

Bergson prevailed on the noted playwright, Ben Hecht², to write a script for what turned out to be a widely performed traveling pageant “*We Will Never Die*”, depicting the crisis³ and to write newspaper ads and articles on the subject. Despite attempts by the Jewish establishment’s “company men”⁴ to sabotage this effort the pageant was performed twice to large audiences in New York’s Madison Square Garden, and was also performed in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington DC, where it was well attended by America’s political leaders and Eleanor Roosevelt. The pageant was directed by Moss

¹ unfortunately only Orthodox rabbis agreed to participate

² Hecht was not a political man until he met Bergson in New York. He wrote (paraphrase): “*I was an honest writer minding his own business until walking down the street bumped into history.*”

³ after some initial resistance rabbis were convinced to say Kaddish on stage for European Jews. Initially they felt it was not appropriate to say that prayer on stage

⁴ primarily leaders of American Jews: Rabbi/Dr. Steven Wise – a man with a phenomenally bloated ego, an ardent follower of Roosevelt and a Socialist-Zionist, and Dr. Nachum Goldman - later head of the World Jewish Congress and considered to be candidate for Israel’s President. It was observed that the few meetings which the establishment Jewish leaders held about the Holocaust were often broken off for lunch. The “leaders” seemed to have truly been “Out to Lunch ...”

Hart. Starring in it were Edward G Robinson and Paul Muni and its score was written by Kurt Weill⁵.

Prior to meeting Peter Bergson, among his other works Ben Hecht rewrote the script of *Gone With the Wind* in about one week of intense work at the request of one of the Hollywood moguls. It is a testimony to his character that after meeting Bergson in New York he gave up his lucrative writing activities and dedicated himself to work for saving the Jews of Europe. As a side note, it is not to our credit as Jews that only two anti-Nazi/anti-Fascist movies were produced during the war, both by non-Jews (one by Charlie Chaplin: *The Great Dictator*), in spite of strong Jewish presence in Hollywood.

Ben Hecht was an Academy Award winning screen writer. He was not a political activist before meeting Bergson, but after their meeting dedicated himself to saving Jews. He was disheartened by the Jewish and Zionist establishment’s negative attitude toward the rescue efforts and after the “Kasztner Trial”⁶ in Israel he wrote a damning book, “*Perfidy*”⁷, which was apparently banned in Israel, along with Rabbi Weissmandl’s *Min HaMetzar*.

Perfidy exposes some of the Holocaust era record of top Socialist-Zionist leaders and Jewish leaders in the free West. It is a testimony to Hecht’s character that after he wrote his book he read it to seven high-level Zionist leaders in America, who burst into tears. Hecht withheld publishing his book for quite a while after he asked these leaders

⁵ Ben Hecht wrote in *Perfidy* that most American Jewish creative people whom he approached refused to participate

⁶ actually it was the trial of Malchiel Greenwald - accused by the State of Israel of slandering Kasztner. The court condemned Kasztner and the episode is generally known as the “Kasztner Trial”. Apparently the files relating to the trial “disappeared” from relevant archives (conversation with Prof. David Kranzler)

⁷ “Kachas” in Hebrew

whether to publish or not, and they unanimously asked him not to publish his work.

Ben Hecht wrote about the Bergson Group's rescue efforts: "*And who blocked our way? Jewish leaders. Jews of name and position, who feared that they would be recognized as Jews and not as Americans. One who fought with all his might against our rescue and publicity campaigns was Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the various Jewish congresses.*" He calls to task also the Yishuv war time leaders, primarily Weizmann, Ben Gurion and Sharett and especially the Sochnut's functionary in Hungary and subsequent high-level MAPAI party member in Israel: Dr. Rezső Kasztner.

It is sad that the ones who tried to diminish Bergson's efforts, and engaged in significant obstructionism, which was in fact sabotage, were apparently the leaders of the modern Jewish establishment, foremost their leader, Rabbi Steven Wise, who tried to portray Bergson and his collaborators as mere troublemakers, adventurers and con men. Another noted Zionist leader, Dr. Nachum Goldman, tried to use his influence in Washington with the apparently antisemitic State Department to destroy Bergson's credibility and eliminate Bergson's group's activities by having Bergson deported from the USA or drafted. When about four hundred rabbis demonstrated in Washington to call attention to our severe plight in Europe Roosevelt apparently asked who was the demonstrating group. Apparently one of his Jewish advisors told him that it was just a group of old men from a nursing home ...

Bergson was very effective in gaining political support in Washington. Characteristically, the main Jewish organizations pressured senators and congressmen to drop support for Bergson and his rescue efforts. It is perhaps telling that those who responded to such calls for boycott and sabotage of rescue were Jews. Because of this Bergson later focused his efforts on politicians from states without significant Jewish voters, and drew his support from Christian politicians whom Steven Wise and other

American Jewish leaders could not easily pressure. It is notable that Bergson was able to organize prayers for us in about 6,000 Churches in America.

One of the Bergson group's "small" achievements was effective political pressure in Washington which resulted in President Roosevelt reluctantly setting up what became known as the War Refugee Board (WRB), which is estimated as saving over 200,000 lives in Europe, mostly Jews. Raoul Wallenberg's heroic mission to Budapest was a result of the Bergson group's activities¹.

George Mantello (Mandel)

An important rescuer was George Mantello (Mandel), an Orthodox Jew originally from Romania and representing El Salvador in Switzerland. He was instrumental in issuing large numbers of El Salvadorean papers to Jews. These turned out to be the best protection papers and afforded the greatest protection to Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. One of the advantages of these papers was that they could be used to protect an entire family - including a "virtual family" of unrelated individuals.

During a critical time Mantello was, indeed, one of the most important *El Salvadors*: "The Saviors", for the Jews of Hungary.

His major contribution toward saving Jews was finding and broadly publicizing the *Auschwitz Report*. Thru Budapest he obtained Rabbi Weissmandl's summary of the Report from Mr. Moshe Krauss and lost no time publicizing it over major news networks. As a result there was a major grass roots protest in Switzerland. Sermons in Swiss churches focused on the tragedy and a leading Swiss Protestant priest quickly wrote and published a book "*Am I my Brother's Keeper?*" There were over 400 major headlines in various Swiss papers deploring the depth of

¹ the estimated 200,000 or more who were saved by the Bergson Group include those rescued by Raoul Wallenberg

depravity to which Europe sank. This reaction was unprecedented in intensity and level of participation – and surely wasn't matched in the USA or the Yishuv. These exemplary events in Switzerland were by the Swiss people and not the government or the banks, which have a different track record to account for¹. The Swiss grass root movement in 1944 finally forced action by leaders of various countries, including President Roosevelt, who issued a grave warning to Admiral Horthy, the leader of Hungary. There were strong letters of protest and warning also from Churchill. Letters were sent to Horthy also by the King of Sweden and the Pope. The net effect of George Mantello's actions was the stopping of the trains from Hungary to Auschwitz, which until then took the life of twelve thousand Jews a day – including many of my close relatives. Thus, Mantello is “the man who stopped the trains”².

The leading Jewish Agency functionary in Hungary, Dr. Rezső Kasztner, and the JOINT's representative in Switzerland, Sally Meyer, urged Mantello not to publicize the report³. After the war Kasztner became a leading political functionary in Israel in Ben-Gurion's party. He was accused of collaboration with the Nazis and was character witness for one of the leading Nazis, Kurt Becher, head of the SS Economic Department⁴. Kasztner saved Becher from the rope and his testimony was in the name of the Jewish Agency. He tried to save the life of three other Nazis, but didn't succeed at that. Eichmann spoke about Kasztner with great admiration, as did Becher in a recent TV interview to Israeli television. Kasztner's highly publicized trial in Israel was very damaging

to Ben-Gurion⁵ and his party. Later Kasztner was assassinated on a Tel-Aviv street under suspicious circumstances⁶ somewhat similar to the rather puzzling Rabin assassination⁷. To date it is not clear who ordered Kasztner's assassination. It may or may not be “coincidental” that an Israeli journalist, Dr. Moshe Keren, of Ha'aretz died of a “heart attack” in a German hotel room soon after he arrived from Israel to interview the Nazi Kurt Becher.

Recha and Yitzchak Sternbruch

There were other exemplary Jews who saved many lives. Two of them were Mrs. Recha Sternbruch and her husband Yitzchak in Switzerland. They had to fight opposition and obstructionism by the JOINT leadership in Switzerland, mainly by Sally Meyer. They risked being jailed in Switzerland for breaking some regulations during their uncompromising saving Jews. One of their many achievements was release of a large number of Jews from Theresienstadt.

Rabbi Solomon Schoenfeld

In his youth he went from London to the Slovak Nitra yeshiva and studied with Rabbi Weissmandl. They stayed in touch after Rabbi Schoenfeld returned to England and during the Shoah he was considerably influenced by Rabbi Weissmandl's suggestions. He is credited with saving about 4,000 of us during the Shoah – mostly as part of the *Kindertransport*. He was a maverick and was not only an extremely talented organizer and rescuer who was always improvising to meet immediate challenges, but had a very warm heart. He was also the first to bring kosher food and a Jewish spirit to the broken women and

¹ as in Israel

² title of a book by Prof. David Kranzler

³ in part because they were concerned that negative publicity for the Nazis may jeopardize release of Jews on the “Kasztner train”

⁴ responsible for concentration camps, gold teeth, clothes, and “processing us” into fertilizer and soap (ref. Ben Hecht's *Perfidy*)

⁵ at the time Ben-Gurion's son, a high-level Police officer, was involved in a scandal and that too was a source of embarrassment to Ben-Gurion

⁶ one of the assassins, Ze'ev Eckstein, was apparently a paid undercover agent of Israeli intelligence until a few months before Kasztner's murder (ref. *Perfidy*).

⁷ where the Shin Bet was apparently deeply involved

men returning to their countries after liberation from the Nazi's hell. Unfortunately, like the other maverick rescuers, his noble and inspired efforts were often sabotaged by other Jews for petty reasons and gravely mistaken ideological reasons. Whereas Rabbi Schoenfeld raised many millions of dollars for rescue he lived in poverty and people were shocked to find out under what destitute circumstances this great man lived.

Anecdotes

Two following fascinating anecdotes from the time of the Holocaust in Bratislava were heard in summer 2002 during a discussion with Mr. David Steiner, who personally witnessed them. He lives in Jerusalem and is originally from Bratislava, where he spent the Shoah era as a teenager. His memories of that time are vivid and he spends much of his time researching the Shoah's effects in Slovakia.

A Messenger

One Succoth during the Shoah when Mr. Steiner was in a Bratislava synagogue, a messenger arrived with a *lulav* and *etrog*¹ smuggled into Slovakia during a dangerous time and sent by a well connected Bratislava Jew and currency dealer: *Shlomo Stern*². After the prayers were said the *lulav* and *etrog* were sent to another synagogue.

Another Messenger

At a certain stage of the Shoah many Bratislava Jews tried to survive by hiding in bunkers in the country side. Mr. Steiner recalls being in a

¹ used in Succoth prayers, a palm branch and a citrus variety called *etrog*

² who provided the initial sum to Rabbi Weissmandl, to bribe the Nazis who agreed to stop the Slovak transports. The money was literally dug out from under the ground, washed and ironed by Mrs. Stern, to look like it came from a Mr. Felix Roth in Switzerland, whom Rabbi Weissmandl invented

bunker during Passover, and seeing a familiar person, a non-Jew called *Natalie* who operated a print shop in Bratislava. He brought some wine and matzo. They were prepared and sent by Rabbi Weissmandl from his bunker, the wine apparently prepared from raisins. After a small amount of each was taken the rest was sent to another bunker. During the story both Mr. Steiner and I got tears in our eyes. It is very touching that goodness and selflessness existed in that dark time. Rabbi Weissmandl was apparently an extremely capable man with a very warm heart, and there were many non-Jews with a pure and good heart who didn't lose their humanity.

Reflections

It is fascinating to analyze the personality of our Jewish and also non-Jewish rescuers. What made them different? Why did they not follow the attitudes and actions of the herd? Why is it that an important but heavy sack lays on the road, many or most pass it by and say "It is not mine to carry!"? What makes some pause and decide to carry the sack on their back day after day, abandoning all other concerns, at great personal risk? What clicks in the mind of some to self-actuate and self-motivate them? What made people like Rabbi Weissmandl, Hillel Kook and also Raoul Wallenberg (among non-Jews) so successful at their endeavor? Dedication to a cause was not enough. There had to be immense multi-dimensional talent, tremendous resourcefulness and even a sense of humor.

Why is it that the financially well endowed "organization men" of the Zionist movement, the World Jewish Congress, the JOINT and of the other major Jewish organizations failed so miserably during our great hour of need? It had to be more than just being "blind fools" and being conformists and careerists - even organizations often have their mavericks. How come our organizations didn't?

Such questions must be asked, answers must be forthcoming and lessons must be learned. Unfortunately Jewish and Zionist leadership and organizations seem to have been unwilling and unable to learn from the past, which is criminal and tragic.

Reflections from Another Perspective

It is striking that the books listed in the next section reflect a radically different reality than what is commonly presented by Holocaust historians, Holocaust museums and official State of Israel doctrine. It is difficult to find honest brokers of history whose aim is seeking and telling the truth vs. distorting truth in service of an ideology. History that is not gathered, distilled and told for the sake of truth¹ is as dangerous and damaging as any other form of propaganda. Historical analysis and publications guided by nationalism, party loyalty and despising the “other” leads to severe distortions, is very damaging and has limited life time since truth can’t be hidden for long.

I am still somewhat shocked that most of the content of this note became known to me only in 2002, almost sixty years after the Shoah. Our propagandists and Holocaust museums apparently did an excellent job hiding the truth so well for so long. The time has surely passed for all of us to recall a story read in childhood, when our soul was still pure, and to exclaim without reservation “*The Emperor is Naked!*”.

Despite propagandists and apologist historians our Holocaust era record is extremely tainted. Some well meaning but somewhat naive Jews advise not dwelling on past “mistakes”. Others say that it is now difficult to judge the Jews and Zionists of the Holocaust era. I wonder if they also consider the deeds of many Germans, Austrians, Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Hungarians, etc. during the war “mistakes” - if we should

¹ *Le Shem Shamayim* (“For the sake of Heaven” - i.e. in the service of Truth alone. Notable is that one of God’s names is “*Emeth*” or “*Truth*”)

also not judge them. It is true that with very rare exceptions we did not fire the bullets, drive the gas vans or pour the Zyklon gas into the gas chambers. Many of our leaders “just” sabotaged rescue. At least in my eyes they and thus their organizations and movements were accessories to the crime. It is now our collective crime that we refuse to come to terms with perhaps the ugliest part of our history. The fact that much of the sabotage was for a “good cause” - Zionism - doesn’t diminish the magnitude of our collective crime against six million Jews - in fact, until we deal with the past with an open mind and a sense of having done wrong Zionism is deeply tainted with the blood of the victims of the Holocaust. Zeal to build a modern state based on Socialist principles and without the “superstition” of Judaism is no excuse that we willingly sacrificed the lives of the Jews of Europe and that now Israel poses as the inheritor of the victims. One must ask, “By what right?” In light of the darker realities of history, there is a huge dose of heartlessness and obscenity in the Israeli triple holidays of Holocaust Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day. Do we still want to use the six million murdered Jews as a stepping stone toward our state? Weren’t our dark acts during their hour of need sufficiently ugly? Don’t we have any limits to our shamelessness? Don’t our children and grandchildren ask how is it that they never head of the subjects raised in this note and why they haven’t seen exhibits about these matters at our showcase museums, such as Yad Vashem, the Diaspora Museum (in Tel Aviv) and the Washington DC Holocaust Museum? Or, why there are no streets in Jerusalem named after our major Holocaust era rescuers²?

One must inevitably ask, “Why remember? To hate?” At least for me the answer is not hate, quite the contrary. Hate is a cancer of the soul and unlike other cancers it is an infectious disease. If anything, there was

² one known exception: a short alleyway in the Ramot Beth neighborhood named Rechoc Giza, after Mrs. Gizi Fleischmann. Even this was done in a half-hearted manner - without a memorial plaque.

and is far too much hate and disdain is Israel directed inward, even from the pre-state days. Hate is rarely productive and is generally destructive. Remembering is a totally different matter. History of the past has value only if it a basis for remembering and learning - to avoid tragedies and mistakes of the past. Despite our reluctance, we, the Jewish people and the Zionist movement¹, have much to learn from our crimes against the Jews of Europe during the Shoah. That learning is obligatory and long overdue.

References

There are a number of books on Jewish rescuers, and the deplorable track record of the free world modern Jewish leadership and leaders of the Socialist-Zionist establishment. Useful reference books include:

Dr. Abraham Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry*

Ben Hecht, *Perfidy*

Prof. David Kranzler, *Thy Brother's Blood*

Prof. David Kranzler, *The Man who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz: George Mantello, El Salvador's and Switzerland's finest hour*

Prof. David Kranzler, *Holocaust Hero: The Untold Story of Solomon Schoenfeld, an Orthodox British Rabbi* (TO BE PUBLISHED IN 2003)

Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million*

Rabbi Moshe Shoenfeld, *The Holocaust Victims Accuse*

Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl, *Min HaMetzar (From the Straights)*, Hebrew

David Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death – Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust*

NOTE: Perfidy and Min HaMetzar were apparently once banned in Israel.

¹ this reaches across Israel's political boundaries. Our Holocaust era crimes were and are covered up by all parties which have been part of the Israeli power structure - that includes "Left", "Right", "Secular", "Religious", "Ashkenazi" and "Sepaharadi".