Learning from the past ~ lessons for today

The Holocaust Memorial Day Committee in association with
the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform;
Dublin City Council, Dublin Maccabi Charitable Trust
and the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland
A Sofa in the Forties

This poem is called *A Sofa in the Forties*, and it is set during the war, with a family of Irish children playing trains on the sofa of their loving home. It then goes on to juxtapose their make-believe play with the terror and tragedy of the Jewish people being transported through Europe at that same historical moment.

In this way, the poem laments the ignorance and disengagement of whole populations while the crime against humanity was in progress, and silently insists that such insulation against the terrible reality must not happen again.

All of us on the sofa in a line, kneeling
Behind each other, eldest down to youngest,
Elbows going like pistons, for this was a train

And between the jamb-wall and the bedroom door
Our speed and distance was inestimable.
First we shunted, then we whistled, then

Somebody collected the invisible
For tickets and very gravely punched it
As carriage after carriage under us

Moved faster, chooka-chook, the sofa legs
Went giddy and the unreachable ones
Far out on the kitchen floor began to wave.

***

We entered history and ignorance
Under the wireless shelf. Yippee-i-ay,
Sang ‘The Riders of the Range’. HERE IS THE NEWS,

Said the absolute speaker. Between him and us
A great gulf was fixed where pronunciation
Reigned tyrannically. The aerial wire

Swept from a treetop down in through a hole
Bored in the windowframe. When it moved in wind,
The sway of language and its furtherings

Swept and swayed in us like nets in water
Or the abstract, lonely curve of distant trains
As we entered history and ignorance.

*Seamus Heaney*
# National Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration

Sunday 27 January 2008
Mansion House, Dublin

## Programme

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Summary of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust

Issued in January 2000, on the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945
And endorsed by all participating countries, including Ireland

We, the governments attending the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, recognise that the Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th Century, a crisis for European civilisation and a universal catastrophe for humanity. In declaring that the Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation, we share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, and to honour those who stood against it. The horrors that engulfed the Jewish People and other victims of the Nazis must forever be seared in our collective memory. With humanity still scarred by genocide, antisemitism, ethnic cleansing, racism, xenophobia and other expressions of hatred and discrimination, we share a solemn responsibility to fight against these evils. Together with our European partners and the wider international community, we share a commitment to remember the victims who perished, to respect the survivors still with us, and to reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for a democratic and tolerant society, free of the evils of prejudice and other forms of bigotry.

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration is designed to cherish the memory of all of the victims of the Nazi Holocaust.
A candle-lighting ceremony is an integral part of the commemoration at which six candles are always lit for the six million Jews who perished, as well as candles for all of the other victims. The commemoration serves as a constant reminder of the dangers of racism and intolerance and provides lessons from the past that are relevant today.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to host this important national event on behalf of the City of Dublin. The Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration is an important date not just for Dublin, but for the whole country.

We mark Ireland’s National Holocaust Memorial Day, each year on the Sunday nearest to 27th January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945.

As always, we are privileged this evening to have Holocaust survivors here with us who have made Ireland their home. Their presence reminds us of our determination to make sure that the victims are never forgotten, that the survivors are never abandoned, and that we never allow an event such as the Holocaust to happen again.

We in Dublin have enjoyed a proud association with Ireland’s Jewish community that goes back more than 150 years. Although small in number, this community has made a remarkable contribution to all spheres of Irish life. This fine example of mutual respect is encouraging for all of us living in Ireland today.

I would like to thank the committee and individuals whose hard work ensures that we give this solemn occasion the respect it is due.

Cllr Paddy Bourke

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Message of Goodwill from the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

This Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration has become firmly established in the national calendar. It is a very significant event which my Department is pleased to support. I would like to commend the Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland for its ongoing educational work in creating awareness of the Holocaust, especially among our young people.

Six million Jews perished in the Holocaust as well as millions of others, annihilated because of their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or political affiliations. It is important that we cherish their memory, remember their sacrifice and commit ourselves to teaching lessons about the Holocaust that are relevant to our lives today. This is particularly true when confronting the problems of racism in general and of antisemitism in particular.

I congratulate everyone involved in organising this important occasion.

Brian Lenihan T.D.
Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

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Message from the Lord Mayor of Dublin

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Cllr Paddy Bourke
Europe – The number of Jews annihilated by the Nazis in each European country

The white figures on black relate to the approximate number of Jews that perished in each European country between September 1939 and May 1945. The total of just over 5,750,000 does not include thousands of infants murdered by the Nazis in late 1941, before their births could be recorded. Thousands of people from the remoter villages in Poland were added to the deportation trains which left larger localities, without any record of their existence or of their fate.
The Nazi Holocaust –
A systematic programme to exterminate the Jews of Europe

- The first concentration camp, Dachau, is established to hold the prisoners arrested after the arson attack on the Reichstag parliament building in February 1933.
- May 1933 – Nazi students and militiamen light huge public bonfires in which they burn books by Jews, communists and other ‘disruptive’ influences.
- 1933 onwards – Jews are expelled from the army, the civil service, professional associations, sports and social clubs.
- 1935 – The Nuremberg Laws strip Jews of citizenship and define them by racial criteria.
- 35,000 Jewish war veterans who had won medals for bravery during WWI lose their privileges.
- 9 November 1938 – Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass).
- 275,000 men, women and children with disabilities die in Nazi euthanasia programmes.
- 100,000 Jews die in labour camps between 1939 and 1940.
- Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, SS mobile murder squads known as Einsatzgruppen murder over 2,000,000 civilians, most of them Jews.
- Some 500,000 Jews die in ghettos from starvation and disease.
- 30,000 Jewish partisans fight the Nazis in Eastern Europe.
- In the Warsaw Ghetto, more than 100,000 Jews die of starvation and disease, more than 300,000 are deported to the death camps and 7,000 are killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising between 19 April and 16 May 1943.
- 1,000,000 Jews, 70,000 Christian Poles, 23,000 Gypsies, 15,000 Soviet prisoners and thousands of others die at Auschwitz.
- 1,500,000 Jewish children were murdered by the Nazis as well as thousands of other children whom they considered unfit to live.
- Of the 300,000 Jews who go into hiding, pretend to be Aryans or acquire false identity papers, 100,000 die after capture or betrayal.
- Out of approximately ten million Jews living in Europe before 1939 only one third survived the Holocaust.
Every annual Yom Ha-Shoah commemoration brings new testimony of the previously forgotten: nightmares told by friends, congregants, survivors, and the children of survivors. *Kristallnacht* is recalled:

In November 1938, Herschel Grynspan, a Jewish student in Paris, assassinated the Third Secretary at the German embassy, Ernst Vom Rath. Headlines appeared in the Nazi newspaper *Der Angriff* that stated “From this vile deed arises the imperative demand to proceed at once against the Jews with the most severe consequences.” In response to the assassination, the Nazis launched *Kristallnacht* – the Night of Broken Glass.

During that state-sponsored pogrom, 7,500 Jewish shops were wrecked and their windows smashed – leaving the streets strewn with glass. Hundreds of synagogues, Jewish homes, schools and businesses were destroyed and burnt to the ground. Ninety-one Jews were murdered and twenty thousand Jewish men were thrown into concentration camps.

The Jewish communities of Germany were fined 1 billion Reichsmarks to pay for the damage.

Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938

Kristallnacht provoked outrage abroad and disquiet amongst ordinary Germans. Three days later, one hundred senior Nazi officials gathered to discuss the solutions to the ‘Jewish Question’. They considered plans such as confining Jews in ghettos but finally decided to get them out of the economy and out of the country. At the time, expulsion appeared to them as an adequate measure. After *Kristallnacht*, Jewish businessmen had to sell their businesses at very low prices, employers were urged to sack Jewish workers and offices were set up to speed emigration.

Kristallnacht had an instant impact on world public opinion. Within a week, a deputation that included Chief Rabbi Hertz of Great Britain and Chaim Weitzmann, later president of Israel, persuaded the British government to allow Jewish child refugees into Britain. The first *kindertransport* left Berlin by train via Holland in December 1938. The children arrived in London’s Liverpool Street Station where they were met by their volunteer foster parents or representatives of hostels and boarding schools. Over the next 10 months, almost 10,000 Jewish children aged between two and eighteen years arrived in Britain via the *kindertransports*. They came from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Each child clutched a small suitcase holding their most cherished possessions. Most of the children never saw their parents again.

Geoffrey Phillips, who lives in Dublin, escaped from Germany as a thirteen-year-old on one of the *kindertransports*. He recalls that night: *In the early hours of the morning we heard that our synagogue had been set on fire by squads of Hitler Youth. Later we heard the same thing was happening all over the country. Before we had recovered from the shock of this terrible news, there was a knock on the door. Two plainclothes policemen asked for my father, told him to pack a change of clothes and took him away.*

*Kindertransport* children found refuge in Northern Ireland on a farm in Millisle in County Down where over 200 children aged between three and eighteen years were able to stay and work before moving on after the war.

Geoffrey Phillips today

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**Kindertransport**
The Face of God after Auschwitz

All those souls believing in Gods,
Translating saliva into prayers,
Heating dreams into myths,
Chilling myths into the stone
Foundations of a belief -
I wipe away the fog of their visions
And am alone; a freezing wind
Stirs, a beat of a wing
From horizon to horizon
Which evokes and destroys forms
And leaves only emptiness behind,
Snowfields covering the earth, a sun
Clouded by black, burnt-out sores.

Maurits Mok (1907-1989)
Translated from the Dutch by Michael O’Loughlin
Six months after victory in Poland, Hitler’s armies launched a succession of attacks on other European countries. By April 1941 German forces had occupied Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France, Luxembourg, Greece and Yugoslavia in addition to pre-war conquests. The degree of brutality shown by the occupiers varied from country to country. Over three million Jews were now trapped and subjected to Nazi racial policies. Another 1.4 million found themselves in the hands of regimes friendly to the Nazis.

Jews were systematically rounded up, forced into ghettos where thousands died from cold, starvation and disease. Others were deported to concentration camps and labour camps where prisoners were subjected to extremely difficult manual labour, starvation and harsh punishment. The death rate was very high.

Between 1941 and 1943 six extermination camps were established, all on Polish soil: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, where victims were gassed to death, ceased operation in 1943 by which time 1,600,000 had been annihilated and all traces of the camps destroyed. Majdanek and Auschwitz were both extermination and death camps where approximately one and a half million victims perished. Soviet prisoners of war and Gypsies also made up the temporary population of the death camps and concentration camps but 98% of the victims were Jews.

Einsatzgruppen – Action Groups

Acting on the orders of Security Police Chief Reinhard Heydrich, Einsatzgruppen moved through captured territory rounding up and murdering civilians, including women and children. They shot mainly Jews but also Gypsies, Communists and others on racial and ideological grounds. They were helped by local collaborators, German police, and many others. The shooting of Jews into mass graves was supplementary to the gas chambers in the death camps. German mobile killing squads murdered Jews in towns, villages, fields, and cemeteries throughout Poland and other Nazi-occupied lands. Jews not killed by these death squads were packed into newly created ghettos to await “further measures.”

I believe
I believe in the sun,
Even when it’s not shining,
I believe in love,
Even when I cannot feel it,
I believe in God,
Even when God’s silent

Anon

Found in a Jewish hiding place during the Holocaust

It is true that not all the victims were Jews, but all the Jews were victims.

Elie Wiesel
Operation Barbarossa – The invasion of the Soviet Union

The invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 launched new levels of terror and systematic mass murder against the Jews.

Every year, on September 29th, people gather at a place in the Ukraine called Babi Yar, to mourn the deaths of those who were massacred there by the Nazis in 1941.

Babi Yar

No monument stands over Babi Yar.
A drop sheer as a crude gravestone.
I am afraid.
Today I am as old in years as all the Jewish people.
Beset on every side.
Hounded, spat on, slandered.
I seem to be then a young boy in Byelostok.
I seem to be Anne Frank
Transparent as a branch in April.
Blood runs, spilling over the floors.
The bar-room rabble-rousers
give off a stench of vodka and onion.
A boot kicks me aside, helpless.
In vain I plead with these pogrom bullies.
While they jeer and shout,
‘Beat the Yids. Save Russia!’
The wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar.
The trees look ominous, like judges.
Here all things scream silently,
and, barring my head,
slowly I feel myself turning grey.
And I myself am one massive, soundless scream
above the thousand thousand buried here.
I am each old man
here shot dead.
I am every child
here shot dead.
Nothing in me
shall ever forget!

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Babi Yar is a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev. The Nazis occupied the city on 19 September 1941; Ten days later notices were posted all over town which read: All Jews living in the city of Kiev are to report by 8 o’clock on the morning of Monday 29th September at the corner of Melnikovsky and Dokhturov Streets. They are to take with them documents, money, valuables, as well as warm clothes, underwear etc. Any Jew not carrying out this instruction and who is found elsewhere will be shot. Any civilian entering apartments evacuated by Jews and stealing property will be shot.

Everyone in Kiev, including the Jews, assumed the notice signalled the beginning of an orderly deportation. Instead it unleashed an orgy of savagery.

According to official German records, 33,771 Jews were killed in two days; but the killing did not stop there. Babi Yar became the burial place not only of Jews but of Ukrainians, Russians, Hungarians, Czechs, Gypsies and prisoners of war. It was not unusual for dozens, sometimes hundreds, of civilians to be shot if one or two people disobeyed a Nazi order either in Kiev or at the nearby concentration camp at Sirez. Patients of the Pavlov psychiatric hospital were gassed and dumped into the ravine. Others, including pregnant women and children were buried alive.

No one will ever know how many people died at Babi Yar, but estimates put the figures at more than 100,000, including 40,000 Jews. The graves are now marked by commemorative monuments including one to the children who died there; but when the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko visited the ravine in 1961, the place was bleak and bare.

I went back there, Yevtushenko said, and there was not one sign of what happened. They were using it as a garbage pit! Garbage! That very evening within three hours, I wrote the poem. I wrote out of shame.

The publication of the poem Babi Yar in the autumn of 1961 catapulted Yevtushenko to fame within Russia and, shortly afterwards, internationally. Shostakovich came across it in an official journal and asked the poet for permission to set Babi Yar to music. Yevtushenko agreed and Babi Yar became the first movement of Shostakovich’s 13th symphony.

The menorah at Babi Yar square.
Persecution of the Gypsies

Millions of people were persecuted and exterminated by the Nazis because, according to Nazi ideology, they threatened the purity of the Aryan race. Jews, Gypsies, people with disabilities, black, ethnic and mixed-race minorities, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian priests and teachers, and political opponents – all became targets.

Originally, people in Europe thought the Romani people came from Egypt, hence the name “Gypsies”. Collectively, they are different tribes who are believed to have migrated to Europe from India around AD 1300. Most of them became military conscripts in armies assembled to fight the invading Muslims or else themselves served in the Muslim armies. Their entry into Europe via the Byzantine Empire was also the direct result of Islamic expansion. As a non-Christian non-white Asian people possessing no territory in Europe, Romanies were outsiders in everybody’s country. For centuries Europeans regarded Gypsies as social outcasts – a people of foreign appearance, language and customs.

The persecution of the Romani people began almost as soon as they arrived in German-speaking lands. As outsiders they were breaking many laws which made it a punishable offence not to have a permanent home or job, and not to be on the taxpayer’s register.

Today, the Gypsies of Europe are referred to as the Roma and Sinti people. There was an influx of Roma in Europe in the 19th century when large numbers settled in southeastern regions, mainly Romania, and their dialect derives from that area. Sinti settled in the northern countries of Europe; they were Gypsies that had been living in this region for several centuries. Their dialect and appearance was different to that of the Roma.

By the 19th century, scholars in Germany and elsewhere in Europe were writing about Romanies as being 'inferior beings'. In 1899 The Gypsy Information Agency was set up in Munich under the direction of Alfred Dillmann, which began cataloguing information on all Romanies throughout the German lands. The results of this were published in 1905 which laid the foundations for what was to befall the Romanies in the Holocaust 35 years later.

During the 1920s the legal oppression of Romanies in Germany intensified despite the liberal laws of the Weimar Republic. In 1920 they were forbidden from public places; Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche had published their book The Eradication of Lives undeserving of Life, in which the Romanies are listed as one of the groups. In 1925 a conference on The Gypsy Question was held which resulted in laws requiring unemployed Romanies to be sent to work camps ‘for reasons of public security’ and for all Romanies to be registered with the police. Persecution of the Roma and Sinti preceded the Nazi regime. In 1929, The Central Office for the Fight Against the Gypsies in Germany was established, and in 1933, just ten days before the Nazis came to power, all civil rights were withdrawn from Romanies. When the Nazis took over German laws against Romanies had already been in effect for hundreds of years.

Between 1933 and 1945 Roma and Sinti suffered greatly as victims of Nazi persecution and genocide. The Nazis viewed Gypsies both as ‘asocials’ and as racial ‘inferiors’ – believed to threaten the biological purity and strength of the ‘superior’ Aryan race. Gypsies were the only other population besides the Jews who were targeted for extermination on racial grounds in the Final Solution. During World War II, the Nazis and their collaborators killed tens of thousands of Roma and Sinti men, women and children across German-occupied Europe.

In September 1935, Romanies became subject to the restrictions of the Nuremberg Law for The Protection of German Blood and Honour, which forbade intermarriage between Germans and non-Aryans, specifically Romanies, Jews and people of African descent. In 1937 the National
Citizenship Law deprived Romanies and Jews of their civil rights, the same year that Heinrich Himmler issued a decree entitled The Struggle Against the Gypsy Plague. The introduction of The Total Solution to the Gypsy Problem was issued by the Reichs Ministry of the Interior in March 1936.

On 2 September 1939 a conference on racial policy discussed the removal of 30,000 German and Austrian Gypsies to occupied Poland. The ‘resettlement in the East’ followed by the mass murder of Roma and Sinti closely resembled the systematic deportations and killings of Jews. In the Summer of 1942, German and Polish Gypsies imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto were deported to Treblinka where they were gassed. German Gypsies were also deported to ghettos in Białystok, Krakow and Radom.

The arrival of Gypsy prisoners in Auschwitz

250 Romani children were murdered in Buchenwald in January 1940 where they were used to test the efficacy of the Zyklon B crystals later used in the gas chambers. In June the same year, Hitler ordered the liquidation of all Jews, Gypsies, mental patients and communists in the entire Soviet Union. The order was given for Einsatzkommandos to kill all Jews, Gypsies and mental patients. Thousands of Roma and Sinti men, women and children were killed in the Einsatzgruppen Aktions in the Soviet Union in June 1941.

In December 1941 Himmler ordered all Romanies remaining in Europe to be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau for extermination. The Gypsy camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was called the Zigeunerlager and over 23,000 Gypsies passed through this camp. They were brought there from German-occupied territories that included Moravia and Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway. They died from gassing, disease, slave labour, and also from medical experiments. Between 1 and 3 August 1944, the Gypsy camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated when thousands of Roma and Sinti men women and children were killed in the gas chambers.

Lucie Adelsberger was a Jewish doctor who worked in the children’s barrack of the zigeunerlager and she recalls the liquidation of the Gypsy camp.

The evacuation had begun. People were pulled from their beds, picked up like bundles and carried out. We had to stand by watching helplessly. In a few minutes the barrack was empty. Each bed was ransacked again and every corner of the barrack was searched. The barrack was locked up once more and the SS went away with their victims. We remained unharmed…The following morning, the Gypsy camp which only the day before had held 3,500 to 4,000 people, was empty.

The fate of the Roma and Sinti varied from country to country depending on local circumstances. Across German-occupied Europe Gypsies, like Jews, were imprisoned, killed or deported. The collaborationist regime of Vichy in France interned 30,000 many of whom were later deported to Dachau, Ravensbruck, Buchenwald and other camps. In Croatia members of the local fascist Ustasha movement killed tens of thousands of Gypsies along with Serbs and Jews. In Romania, thousands of Gypsies along with Jews were expelled to Transnistria (western Ukraine) where most of the deportees died from disease, starvation and brutal treatment. In Serbia, in Autumn 1941, German army firing squads killed almost the entire adult male Gypsy population alongside most adult male Jews.

The unreliability of pre-Holocaust population figures and the nomadic existence of the Roma and Sinti people, make it difficult to estimate the numbers of Gypsies who perished during the Holocaust. Scholarly estimates put the figures between 220,000 and 500,000.

We must aim to prevent future generations from thinking of the Holocaust in terms of anonymous, faceless numbers and remember that unto every victim there was a name.

Yad Vashem
Mahjub bin Adam Mohamed was yet one more of the millions of the Nazis’ victims lost to obscurity without a funeral or a grave.

Bin Adam is the first black victim of the Holocaust to be given a memorial in his adopted country, Germany. A stolperstein – a bronze stumbling block – will be erected on the ground outside the house where he lived in Berlin. The memorial will be placed so that pedestrians have to step around it. Its aim is to stop future generations from thinking of the Holocaust in terms of anonymous, faceless numbers. The Stolperstein is a project conceived by Cologne-based artist, Gunter Demnig, who plans to create a total of 12,000 markers outside houses, giving the name of the person or persons who lived there and the date on which they were captured.

Bin Adam, who was born in Tanzania, joined the colonial German East Africa services and served with the army. He emigrated to Berlin in 1929, where he immediately got into trouble with the authorities by demanding his outstanding service pay. He married a German woman, Maria Schwander, and they had three children - Adam, Annemarie and Bodo. Bin Adam was arrested in 1941, charged with the crime of ‘racial intermarriage’ and taken to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where he died in November 1944.

The persecution of black people under the Third Reich included forced sterilisation and, ultimately, extermination. The memorial to Bin Adam will serve as a reminder of the other minorities as well as black people who were also murdered under Hitler’s regime including: people with disabilities, homosexuals, gypsies, communists, political dissenters and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

By the start of the 20th century, Germany had extensive colonies in Africa. German settlers systematically persecuted native black African tribes. German doctors were carrying out medical experiments on black people under the direction of Eugene Fischer who published his scientific race theories in a book called The Principles of Human Heredity and Race Hygiene, which impressed and influenced Hitler.

After the First World War, France occupied the German Rhineland, deploying colonial African soldiers as the occupying force. The result was hundreds of children born to German women by African soldiers who then became a target for Hitler. In Mein Kampf, he referred to them as ‘Rhineland Bastards’.

In order to keep intact the ‘purity’ of the Aryan population, the Nazis established Commission Number 3, which secretly organised the sterilisation of hundreds of children of African ancestry. By 1937, every identified mixed-race child in the Rhineland had been forcibly sterilised. By the outbreak of war, most black people had fled. The few who remained were annihilated.
Children of the Holocaust in Ireland

Zoltan
I was only four or five at the time as no one is sure of my exact date of birth. I was found by Han in Bergen-Belsen with my sister Edit. Dr Bob Collis was one of the volunteer doctors with the British Red Cross who helped treat me for tuberculosis and other diseases. Eventually, Bob brought us back with him to Ireland and reared us as part of his own family. I took the Collis name as part of my own.

As I reared my own children and grandchildren, I realised there is a void in our family. There were no grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins while I was growing up – they perished in the Holocaust – and my children and grandchildren are missing them too. It is on such family occasions that we become acutely aware of the sense of loss, the absence of close family and distant relatives.

Suzi
I was a very small child when I was found with my brother, Terry, in Bergen-Belsen in 1945. All of our family had perished and we were the only ones left. We were cared for by Luba, The Angel of Belsen. Eventually, Dr Bob Collis found us and brought us home with him to Ireland where we were adopted by a Jewish couple, Elsie and Willie Samuels.

My brother passed away a year ago. Now there are only four of us Holocaust survivors living in Ireland. Apart from my personal loss, Terry’s passing underlines the importance of telling our story to the next generation. It is important that we pass it on to our children and our children’s children.

Tomi Reichental
Tomi was born in 1935 in Piestany, Slovakia, captured and sent to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1944 when he was nine years old. Tomi survived along with his mother, aunt and brother. Thirty five members of his family perished. He has lived in Ireland since 1960.

I could not play like a normal child, we didn’t laugh and we didn’t cry. If you stepped out of line at all, you could be beaten up and even beaten to death. I saw it with my own eyes.

Geoffrey Phillips
Geoffrey Phillips (originally Gunther Philipps) was born in Wanne- eckel, Germany in 1925. In December 1938, along with thousands of other German children, he was sent away to Britain on the kindertransports. He didn’t know where he was going. He had a small suitcase as well as another small bag with provisions, and a ticket to a foreign land. He was thirteen years old.

We heard afterwards that my father had been taken into a concentration camp. A cousin of my father’s was the welfare officer of the Jewish community in a neighbouring town. From her we discovered that Britain was prepared to take in a limited number of young Jewish children. Our cousin urged my mother to register me for the transport.

I am here today, I never saw my parents again.

On this Sunday that marks Holocaust Memorial Day, we pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God. As we recall their sufferings, we strengthen our resolve to reject discrimination and hatred.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin
Auschwitz Revisited

A couple of years ago I had been invited to sing Mozart's opera *Cosi Fan Tutte* in the city of Krakow in Poland. It is a beautiful old town, famous for its medieval square, and the old Jewish quarter which much later was the Ghetto closest to Oswiscem or, as the Germans who built a concentration camp there liked to call it, *Auschwitz*. The manager of the orchestra asked if I would like to visit Auschwitz, assuring me it was very interesting. I thanked him politely for the offer, but said "no, my entire family has been there already." Not that they lived to tell the world how interesting it was; they never came back.

When I was about four years old I went to kindergarten. We lived in a small village on the seashore and my school was in another village about six kilometers away. My school day lasted from nine till three with a lunch break. During that break most of my little classmates would go to their grandparents. While I munched my sandwiches in a silent tête-a-tête with the teacher I waited anxiously for them to return with their pockets full of sweets and coins. They would be holding hands with granny or grandpa at the entrance of the school, stuffed with extra good food and that aura around them of having been pampered in a familiar place that is not exactly home, but so close. Even at four or five years of age it left me with a vague sense of regret.

I said little about it but once when my mother came to collect me in her old car crammed with other kids who had to go back to our village, I had to ask her why we could not go for a visit to my grandparents. My mother did tell me then, in the car, that my grandparents had died in the war. "All of them?" Yes! I didn't give up that easily my dream of going for a visit to my grandparents. My mother did tell me that her sister had died on the 'operating table'.

When I was about five years of age it left me with a vague sense of regret.

I began to recognize that word as I grew up. It always seemed to create that same silence in our living room. A moment of intense pain. My father would sit in his study and write poems about his parents, his sister, his family.

My parents had a friend called Lydia. I worshipped Lydia. She was beautiful and kind and she gave me one of her siamese cats. Sometimes she'd work as a model for a local fashion designer. "Only long-sleeved stuff, dear", she'd joke to me. She brought me along to a fashion show once and I was speechless with admiration. She was sad afterwards when she took me home. "I miss my sister, you know". She sat in a chair in our living room, drank a lot of gin, and rubbed nervously at the concentration camp number on her arm. Then I understood why she could not wear the short sleeves. She got very drunk that night and I wanted to rub her arm. Then I understood why she could not wear the short sleeves. She got very drunk that night and I wanted to know why. Why did Lydia not get married and have children and where was her sister? That was when I first felt the great fear, when they told me how the Nazis had 'experimented' on Lydia and her sister, that she could never have children and that her sister had died on the ‘operating table’.

One day a man came to the door with a document. I remember standing behind my father, curious as to what it was all about. My father signed the piece of paper and when he turned around he was crying. I immediately started to cry as well. "I had to sign it", he said. He had signed in favour of the execution of a war criminal. Both my parents were against capital punishment. That he cried because he signed the death penalty of a man who had betrayed my father's sister and sent her off to the camps, I will never, never forget. As I will never forget how slowly the horrors of the Nazi regime came to life in mine.

My parents had a friend called Lydia. I worshipped Lydia. She was beautiful and kind and she gave me one of her siamese cats. Sometimes she'd work as a model for a local fashion designer. "Only long-sleeved stuff, dear", she'd joke to me. She brought me along to a fashion show once and I was speechless with admiration. She was sad afterwards when she took me home. "I miss my sister, you know". She sat in a chair in our living room, drank a lot of gin, and rubbed nervously at the concentration camp number on her arm. Then I understood why she could not wear the short sleeves. She got very drunk that night and I wanted to know why. Why did Lydia not get married and have children and where was her sister? That was when I first felt the great fear, when they told me how the Nazis had ‘experimented’ on Lydia and her sister, that she could never have children and that her sister had died on the ‘operating table’.
There they were; my parents’ friends, artists, musicians, many with numbers on their arms. They were laughing and joking and fighting and shrugging off the past. But both my sister and I were used to the phone calls deep in the night when suddenly a friend couldn’t take it any more. The memories. Sometimes we never saw them again.

My father had been raised in the Jewish quarter in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, he always told me, he first became aware of his Jewishness one day when he took a walk with his sister through Amsterdam. My father was a blond, blue-eyed child, his older sister dark. A woman threw an apple to him from her window in a street. He broke it in two and handed half of it to his sister. “Now don’t you go giving that Jewchild my apple,” the woman shouted at him. My father looked around, saw no one else, stared at his sister, suddenly understood, and they ran away, giggling.

My grandparents were tremendously naïve. Even now the description of the way they packed for the camp, Auschwitz, causes me to wring my hands in despair. My neat grandmother folding handkerchiefs in her small case, my grandfather in his freshly pressed three piece suit. My father was with them when they left for the trains, begging them not to go. He knew what would happen to them. My grandfather looked at him in kindly dismay, surely his son, or these artists, was exaggerating? What on earth could the Germans do to them? And he put on his hat while my grandmother checked for the last time if the house was clean. “We want it to be tidy, for when we come back,” she said, and hugged my father.

My mother sang the songs she’d heard her mother sing and threatened us in Russian, my grandmother’s mother tongue, when we were disobedient. She did tell us stories about her war. But more about her parents’ life, her mother’s work for the suffragettes and how the Nazis had walked into their vast house one morning, looked around, and declared that the house was now theirs.

When I was older my parents allowed me to read through literature from the Second World War. I had to come to terms with the inexplicable cruelty of the Nazis some way or other. I had to deal with my nightmares. I couldn’t.

My aunt Saar’s name is engraved on the marble wall of the Hollandse Schouwburg, a theatre where she was kept by the Nazis with a group of small children for about a month. She was thirty five when she died. She had been very close to my father who by then was already a well known writer. Together they moved in the bohemian circles of Amsterdam, together they befriended the famous Jewish author Joseph Roth, together they decided never to wear the yellow star on their coats, to identify themselves as Jews. She was betrayed by some neighbours. People who owned a Restaurant that is still thriving in Amsterdam. It is now run by their children and grandchildren. How often did we drive past that place and my father would always mutter “Informers”. How I hated everybody who sat there, eating. But hatred was not what we were living for. My parents joined Amnesty and opened their doors to writers from Chile, Russia or South Africa, regimes that tortured and suppressed as the Nazis had done.

My father grew old. He started breaking out in a sweat of fear, thinking back. Age hit him at the core of his inner feelings. He grew weak and sat down in front of us, crying, finally. On his sister’s birthday he wanted to go to Auschwitz to raise a statue in her honour. I liked the idea, but I had to stop him from packing. How ironic. He continued to cry humming her favoured Yiddish songs. The spectacle was unbearable. The Nazis had got him after all. A few weeks later he died. I was grateful.

I sat at my mother’s deathbed for the last time. I had the feeling that I had to listen to her very carefully, because when she was gone, there would be nobody left to tell the exact details. Of how they had hung her sister or how she had escaped from a razzia. Her last words were about my daughter. She smiled. My mother died. So it was just my sister and me drifting among the dead. I think we always had that feeling.

My daughter who lives with me in a hopefully safe Dublin and likes to walk a tiny bit on the wild side of life, tells me innocently that those youngsters who flirt with Nazi theories and Nazi symbols just think of it as a game. And then, suddenly I see the familiar “jews go home” sprayed in bright letters on a wall in Temple Bar. And iron crosses tattooed on teenage wrists. Maybe this is a game they should not learn to play. Can somebody tell them that? It is up to us to make very sure that nobody forgets what happened.

I started dismantling my parents house, took apart the bookcases and found a little scrap of paper with some names on it. It was a tiny piece of the list of dead family members sent by the Red Cross after the war. A twelve year old, a twenty year old, people in the bloom of life with the same name as me. Why had they kept it in a book? I will never know.

Like I never knew these people, my family, who went to visit Auschwitz.

Judith Mok
Righteous Among the Nations
– When neighbours reached out to help

The story of the Righteous is the story of men and women who risked their lives and those of their families to help save Jews during the Holocaust; people who, as Si Frumkin, a survivor of the Kovno ghetto, tells us, “ignored the law, opposed popular opinion, and dared to do what was right”. In Jewish tradition there is a famous quotation from the Talmud: For he who kills one life is considered as if he had destroyed an entire world and therefore he who saves one life is regarded as if he had saved an entire world. (TB Sanhedrin 4:5)

This Talmudic quotation which is included in the Yad Vashem diploma awarded to the Righteous Among the Nations, should he treated literally; not only those Jews who have been personally saved by the Righteous owe them their lives, but all their descendants as well.

Thousands upon thousands of Jews worldwide are alive today because one day, decades ago, someone decided to risk his life to protect an individual from the most implacable killing machine the world had ever known. The heroism the Righteous displayed was an event which was limited in time; our gratitude, however, can know no limits. It will remain as long as the Jewish people exist.

In 1953 the State of Israel established Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, in order to document and record the history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. That institution inaugurated the award of Righteous Among the Nations in 1963 to honour non-Jews who had saved Jews during the Second World War. Over 21,000 people from 38 different countries have received the award. There are countless others who have never received any recognition, and many more who were killed by the Germans for assisting Jews.

The number of Righteous Among the Nations continues to grow yet there is not a single description of what defines a recipient of the award. They come from all levels of society from different backgrounds, ages, religions and ethnic groups. They are individuals, families, groups of friends or members of organised efforts such as the Dutch Resistance, the village of Le Chambon sur Lignon in France, or Zegota (the Council for Aid to Jews) in Poland. They include well-known efforts such as that of businessman Oskar Schindler, to assistance by simple villagers in occupied countries. Some such as the Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg in Hungary; the Polish diplomat, Henryk Slawik; Feng Shan Ho, the Chinese Consul General in Vienna; or the Japanese official Sempo Sugihara in Lithuania – saved several thousand Jews, whereas others saved just one. All however, were united in their desire to help their fellow human beings. Many of those who survived Nazi rule and occupation in Europe between 1939 and 1945 owe their survival to non-Jews.

In every single case the decision to save a Jew could mean death. And not only death to the Righteous person, but often to his family and sometimes his neighbours as well. Death was the penalty for remaining human in the face of inhumanity. Under German occupation the Righteous feared their neighbours as much as the authorities. A Jew in hiding was a potential threat to all those who lived nearby. Hostile neighbours could be as dangerous as the Gestapo, often betraying both those in hiding and those who were hiding them.

Finding refuge in non-Jewish surroundings was dictated by two basic factors – the attitude of local inhabitants and the punishment awaiting those who extended help. Those who did escape ran into societies poisoned by antisemitism. The vast majority perished at the hands of Nazi collaborators, whether Swiss border guards, French police arresting foreign Jews, Poles refusing to hide escapees from ghettos and camps, or Russian partisans who killed Jews seeking to join them in their fight against the Germans. Many local people profited by illicit gains from abandoned Jewish property and a great number either favoured or were apathetic toward the extermination of the Jews. Those who might have been ready to assist Jews were intimidated by the likelihood of punishment. Very few overcame their fears and extended help.

Before the Second World War 3,300,000 Jews lived in Poland. 3,000,000 were murdered in the Holocaust by the Nazis and their collaborators. At the end of the war 300,000 Polish Jews remained alive, many of whom owed their survival to the courage of Polish individuals. Poland has the greatest number of Righteous Among the Nations. Those who have been recognised under Yad Vashem’s very strict criteria are only part of a larger group whose number we will never know.

After the war, many Righteous encountered hostility in communist Poland and other eastern European countries, if their brave actions became known. In the immediate post-war years, the Krakow Catholic weekly newspaper, Tygodnik Powszechny began publicising the heroism of Poles who had saved Jews. But many Righteous named in articles called in to complain saying that their neighbours were angry, telling
them that their safety had been compromised to save detestable Jews! Even today, many descendants of the Righteous refuse to accept the Yad Vashem award, for fear of antagonising their neighbours.

Antonia Wyrzykowska who saved seven Jews in Jedwabne, the site of a mass murder of Jews by Poles under German occupation, was hounded out of her town after the war for having helped the enemy; even today, she would not return.

Help during the Holocaust took on many different forms and Yad Vashem recognises at least four different ways: hiding Jews; helping them to ‘pass’ as non-Jews; assisting with escapes; and sheltering Jewish children. Each of these had its own risks and complications associated with it just as a rescuer’s own situation might have created or prevented different opportunities for aid. Since the inauguration of the Righteous Among the Nations Award, the question of ‘why’ has been asked of every individual upon whom it has been conferred – what motivated these people to act when so many did not? Dr Mordechai Paldiel, first director of the Righteous Among the Nations in Yad Vashem believes the only answer is what he terms ‘the mystery of goodness’.

The mystery may never be fully understood but something motivated each of the rescuers towards good rather than towards collaboration or even just to silence. However, many recipients of the Righteous Among the Nations award, quite simply ask “how could they not help?” Or, “why not?” Those who rescued Jews made choices.

Acts by the Righteous cannot be quantified. Some things small in number are great in consequence. The goodness we recognise is not a matter of numbers nor even of grand acts. Goodness in the hell of the camps was as simple as a boiled potato or a piece of bread given to a starving fellow inmate. Primo Levi recalls the kindness of his gentle fellow prisoner: …Thanks to Lorenzo I managed not to forget that I myself was a man (from: Survival in Auschwitz).

The Righteous refute the notion that there was no alternative to passive complicity with the enemy. The farmers, priests, nuns and soldiers, the believers and non-believers, the old and the young from every background in every land made the impossible possible. Their altruism calls us to understand the different choices that individuals make, and to commit to challenging every example of intolerance that we witness.

The challenge of our time is not whether to remember but what to remember and how to transmit our memory to our children and our children’s children.

Through their compassion and valour, without regard for religious or ethnic differences, the Righteous upheld the honour of the human race and the conscience of the world.

Michael Salberg, Director, Anti-Defamation League

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<th>Country &amp; Ethnic Origin</th>
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<td>Netherlands***</td>
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<td>** Brazil</td>
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<td>** One of each: Chile, Japan, Luxembourg, Portugal, Turkey, Georgia (Gruzia)</td>
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TOTAL PERSONS 21,758

* These figures are not necessarily an indication of the actual number of Jews saved in each country, but reflect material on rescue operations made available to Yad Vashem.

** The Danish Underground requested that all its members who participated in the rescue of the Jewish Community not be listed individually, but as one group.

*** Includes two persons originally from Indonesia, but residing in the Netherlands.
The Mika Family

Stefan Mika lived with his parents, Pawel and Karolina, in the village of Zaborów near Tarnów, where they had a large farm. There were 80 families in the village: seventy nine of them were Catholic and one family, the Tiders, was Jewish. Mr Tider was a poor tailor who worked hard to support his wife and four children, Mendel, Chaim, Anna and Maria. The two families became acquainted as Stefan’s father would give the Tider family farm produce in exchange for Mr Tider taking in their sewing. Stefan and his parents were recognised by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.

Shortly after the outbreak of the war, the Tider family was deported to the Brzesko ghetto.

In July 1943, Mendel Tider, with another Jewish man, Jósef Langdorf, came in the middle of the night, to Stefan’s house. He asked Pawel if he would hide them. “Of course we’ll hide you” replied Stefan’s father. Stefan and his father built a hiding place for them in the attic of their barn. Every day Stefan would bring them food and look after their daily needs. He was 16 years old.

A few months later, two partisans arrived at Stefan’s house in the middle of the night. “Can you hide us?” they inquired of Stefan’s father, “we are on the run from the Germans.” They hardly had to ask! “Of course we’ll hide you” replied Stefan’s father, and they built a second hiding place for the partisans. Stefan brought food, emptied buckets and now looked after the daily needs of the two hidden groups. The Jews and the partisans never learned of the others’ existence.

The most dangerous time for Stefan’s family was when the Germans billeted three Wehrmacht officers on the estate while they were building a temporary bridge across the river. At the same time there were two Jews in one hiding place, two partisans in another and three Wehrmacht officers in one of the farm houses!

All survived. The Germans eventually left and the war ended. After the war Mendel went to America and Stefan is still in contact with Mendel’s family. Josef stayed in Poland where he remained a close friend of Stefan’s family until his death in 1970.

Albanian Muslims who rescued Jews

On 18 January 2007 A Muslim family who saved 26 Jews from the Nazis and led them to safety in the mountains of Central Albania was honored by the Anti-Defamation League in New York with its Courage to Care Award. It was presented posthumously to Mefail and Njazi Biçaku on International Rescuer’s Day. Three family members, Muhamet Biçaku, Elida Hazbiu and Qemal Biçaku were present to accept the award, two of whom came from Albania for the occasion.

In September 1943, word reached Mefail Biçaku that a number of Jewish people were in great danger. He undertook to protect, feed and shelter them, helped by his son, Njazi.

In February 1944, when the Nazis descended upon the mountain hiding-place, not a single Jew fell into their hands. During the Holocaust, Albania protected and sheltered its Jewish population. Through the valiant efforts of Muslims and Christians, all of Albania’s Jews survived the Holocaust.

Michael Salberg, Director of International Affairs at the Anti Defamation League, said when he presented the award: Mefail, his son Njazi and their entire family had the courage to care. Through their compassion and valor without regard for religious or ethnic differences, they upheld the honor of the human race and the conscience of the world. In the moral void that engulfed the world in those nightmare days when the cruelty of the Nazis ran rampant, the Biçaku family was among those few shining stars.

Mefail and Njazi Biçaku have both been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.
Irena Sendler

In Autumn 1940 the Nazis forced the Jews of Warsaw and the surrounding towns and villages inside the Warsaw Ghetto. At its peak, the ghetto held 450,000 Jews. The ghetto was so overcrowded that over a hundred thousand Jews died of starvation and disease.

Irena Sendler was a young Polish Catholic woman who joined Zegota, the Council for Aid to Jews in Occupied Poland. This underground network forged thousands of birth certificates and other documents to give Jews safe Aryan identities. Irena was employed in the social welfare department of the Warsaw municipality and received a special permit that allowed her access to and from the ghetto. This gave her the opportunity to provide many Jews with medicine, clothing and money. When walking through the ghetto streets, Irena wore an armband with the Star of David, both as a sign of solidarity with the Jewish people and in order not to draw attention to herself. Irena was part of an operation to smuggle Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto and was personally responsible for saving the lives of 2,500 Jewish children.

Irena helped hundreds of children to escape to orphanages, convents and private homes in the Warsaw region. She persuaded parents to hand over their children, and give them a chance to live. She kept a record of the child’s Jewish name as well as the new Christian name and new address.

Irena and her colleagues had widespread contacts on the Aryan side. Children who were old enough to talk were taught to rattle off Christian prayers and mimic other religious behaviour. Some children escaped on foot or in the arms of volunteers through sewer pipes and other underground passageways. Irena arranged for babies and small children to be smuggled out by merchants, under their loads of goods. One trolley driver and Zegota member hid small children in trunks, suitcases, or sacks under his back-seat. An ambulance driver kept his dog beside him in the front seat having trained him to bark to camouflage any cries or noises from the babies hidden under stretchers.

On 20 October 1943 the Gestapo arrested and interrogated Irena, whom they had long suspected was running a smuggling operation. Irena refused to talk, even when she was beaten until her legs and feet were broken. She was then taken to Pawiak prison for execution.

On the day she was to be executed, Zegota bribed one of the Gestapo agents, who allowed Irena to escape. He even posted her name on public bulletin boards as one of the executed, thus making her invisible to the Nazis. She then went into hiding until Poland was liberated. Immediately after the war, she handed over the names of the rescued children.

After the war, Irena married, raised two children of her own, and continued her career as a social worker in Warsaw. The beatings she had suffered at the hands of the Gestapo left her permanently disabled and she has had trouble walking ever since. Because Poland was under a communist regime, and the postwar climate was not safe, Irena never talked openly about her rescue work. In 1965 Irena was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations but only received her award in 1983 when the communist authorities allowed her to travel abroad. Irena remains modest about her heroism in saving Jewish children from the Nazis.
Arabs who saved Jews

Nazi plans to persecute and eventually exterminate Jews also extended throughout Arab lands. Between June 1940 and May 1943 the Nazis, their Vichy French collaborators and their Italian fascist allies murdered between 4,000 and 5,000 Jews in north Africa. There were no death camps, but thousands of Jews were consigned to more than 100 brutal labour and concentration camps.

As in other countries where the Nazis took power, many north African locals were both willing participants and collaborators. Many Arabs worked as interpreters, going from house to house with SS officers pointing out where Jews lived. They oversaw work gangs and worked as prison guards in the labour camps.

Harry Alexander, a Jew from Leipsig, managed to escape to France. From there French authorities sent him to the Vichy labour camp at Djeelfa in the Algerian desert. Nobody told them to beat us all the time, he said. Nobody told them to chain us together. Nobody told them to tie us naked to a post and beat us and to hang us by our arms and hose us down, to bury us in the sand... no, they took this into their own hands and they enjoyed what they did.

Morice Tandowski was a Polish-born Jew who had joined the French Foreign Legion. He was stripped of his rifle under Vichy’s antisemitic laws and sent to Berguent labour camp in Morocco. He experienced the tombeau (tomb). Prisoners who were judged not to be working hard enough were forced to dig holes and lie in these faux graves for weeks on end, day and night.

Against a background of increasingly strident denial of the Holocaust currently emanating from extreme Arab circles, it is noteworthy that new research indicates that not all Arabs were Nazi sympathizers. There were also Arabs who risked their lives to save Jews, who welcomed Jews into their homes, shared their meagre rations, guarded their valuables, and warned Jewish leaders about SS raids.

The Bey of Tunis vowed to protect the Jews, saying that they were under his patronage. The sultan of Morocco provided moral support and, at times, practical help to Jewish subjects. In Vichy-controlled Algiers, some imams warned congregants against appropriating Jewish property.

When Khaled Abdelwahhab, a wealthy Tunisian trader, heard that Anny Boukris and her family were in danger of being rounded up by the German occupiers, he drove them to his farm where he hid them and all of their family for several months.

Si Ali Sakkat, a Tunisian landowner who traced his lineage back to the Prophet Mohammed, sheltered 60 Jewish workers who fled the nearby labour camp and hid them and cared for them for several weeks until they were liberated by Allied troops.

Si Kaddour Benghabrit was perhaps the most influential Arab in Europe. He was Imam of the Great Mosque of Paris, and despite warnings from the Nazis, instructed his staff to issue as many as 100 Jews with certificates of Muslim identity.

Not all circles welcome the stories that are now beginning to emerge about Arabs who helped Jews during the Holocaust. There are still families of Arab rescuers who prefer to keep the stories quiet, for fear of adverse reaction.

The story of those who rescued Jews and the Righteous Among the Nations calls us to no longer be passive, to understand the difference that the choices of individuals make, and to commit to challenging every example of intolerance that we witness.

Konstanty Gebert, Polish Council for Christians and Jews
Shanghai’s Jews

European Jews who found refuge in China during the Holocaust, moved on after the War. Many returned to Europe while others emigrated to Israel, the United States, Canada and elsewhere.

Shanghai has two centuries of strong Jewish connections. Established Sephardi (Middle Eastern) Jewish families such as the Hardoons, Ezras, Kadoories and Sassoons built their fortunes in Shanghai, establishing at least seven synagogues and many Jewish hospitals and schools.

Ashkenazi Jews made up the second group. They arrived from Russia via Siberia, Haerbin and Tianjin after anti-Jewish pogroms in 1906. However, the biggest influx of Jews to China, came between 1933 and 1941 when 30,000 mostly Ashkenazi Jews arrived from Nazi-occupied Europe. They came by boat from Italy or by train via Siberia. This was at a time when governments of many nations were imposing harsh restrictions on the immigration of Jewish refugees, especially after 1938 when almost all countries closed their doors to the desperate Jews.

When the Nazis were conducting their furious persecution and slaughter of European Jews, many people rescued Jewish victims of Nazi terror. Thousands of Jews had been issued with visas to cross China by Dr He Fengshan (Feng Shan Ho), Chinese Consul General in Vienna from 1938 to 1940, sometimes referred to as the ‘Chinese Schindler’.

Shanghai was one of the few safe havens for Jews fleeing the Holocaust in Europe as it required neither passport nor visa to stay. Gestapo agents followed refugees to China and in 1942, tried to persuade the Japanese to build death camps on Chongming Island. They refused to do this but in 1943, the Japanese forced Jews to move into a ‘Designated area for stateless refugees’ in Hongkou.

The Jewish ghetto became home to Jews from all walks of life. A synagogue, schools, hospitals and a local newspaper flourished. There were a number of cafes, rooftop gardens and restaurants which gave the area the nick-name ‘Little Vienna’. Those Jews who held jobs in the French Concession area of Shanghai had to secure passes from the Japanese. Poorer refugees were forced into cramped hostels known as heime, where they relied on the generosity of others. Many of the wealthy Jewish trading families left in 1941 and the situation for Jewish refugees became harder. Still, when they heard of events in distant Europe, they realised that they were the lucky ones.

Today there are a few reminders of Jewish life in Shanghai: the Ohel Moishe synagogue and the former Jewish Club (1932) in the grounds of the Conservatory of Music where concerts are still performed. A new Museum of Jewish Refugees in China is planned for the site of the former Ohel Rachel Synagogue which was built by Jacob Elias Sassoon in the late 19th century and nearby there are remains of the Jewish school founded in the grounds by Horace Kadoorie.

Almost all Shanghai’s Jewish refugees from central Europe and Russia as well as the Sephardic congregations survived the Holocaust.
Refuge in Ireland

Fritz and Mirza Marckwald arrived in Ireland on 1st April 1939, and shortly afterwards came to stay in Tramore with my grandparents Edwin and Jessie Jacob. They had had to leave Germany because they were either Jews or of Jewish descent.

My parents, my older brother, Weston, and I lived just down the road from my grandparents so we saw a lot of Fritz and Mirza. I was only eight, but I can picture them clearly. Fritz was tall, slim, soft-spoken, and thoughtful. He wore very thick glasses. He had been in business in Germany, and had financial experience, which was to stand him in good stead later on. Mirza was dark haired and well-built. She was very German, a very capable person, and very definite in her views. She was a good cook, and a superb needlewoman. Their English was not very good, so to improve it, they attended the tiny local primary school, with me!

They were very acceptable “visitors” while they stayed with my grandparents. They then went to Galway but kept closely in touch. In Galway Mirza went to work with “Modes Modernes” using her sewing skills making hats.

Some years later when the manufacture of cut glass was started again in Waterford Fritz was taken on as financial controller, a job that expanded rapidly over the next few years. Fritz and Mirza settled in Waterford for the rest of their lives, and became great friends of my parents.

Stefan Feric must have been about twenty, and was a university student, when he escaped from Austria. I believe he swam the Danube to get away. My father Charles, brother, Weston and I collected him from Vallombrosa, a large house in Bray owned by Philip Somerville-Large, which was a staging post for refugees arriving in Ireland. Mr Somerville-Large put a great deal of effort into finding homes and employment for them.

Stefan stayed in our house in Tramore for many months before being accepted into university to finish his degree. He was a wonderful addition to the household, as he intuitively knew what us boys would enjoy doing. He taught us how to make very good catapults, and he taught us wood carving (or whittling) with a sharp penknife. He saved me from drowning when I got into difficulties bathing on Tramore Strand. He suffered from night-starvation, and always had an apple by his bedside, just in case. Ultimately he got his degree, and found a job with Williams & Woods, jam manufacturers in Dublin, as a chemist. In due course he married, but died a few years ago.

“"I remember being a refugee in your home when I was fourteen years old.”"

These words were said to me a few years ago when I discovered that the mother of a family living nearby was an Austrian refugee. She said she particularly remembered the coloured tiles on the hall floor, which are still there to this day!

My parents, Paddy and Grace Somerville-Large, gave a home to refugees fleeing from Hitler’s regime during the period immediately preceding the Second World War. They were either Jews or of Jewish descent. It was before I was born and I therefore know very little detail about the people who lived in the house. However, it is my understanding that a group of mainly Austrian musicians lived in it.

I also remember a person who worked for Hammond Lane Foundries during the 1930s calling to our home about fifteen years ago. As he gazed at the windows he told me how he recalled hearing music floating out of them all those years ago!

I have the Quakers to thank for an official record of my family’s involvement in giving a home to refugees. My parents were amongst several people who offered them refuge. My wife and I are privileged to be living in the same house in which the refugees had lived during that period.

Bill Somerville-Large

But we have not forgotten…and we have not forgotten those who stood beside us and risked their lives to save Jews.

Abraham Foxman ADL Bnei Brith
Petr Ginz was a 14-year-old Jewish boy from Prague who was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto in 1942. He was a very bright and talented young man and the driving force behind Vedem (we lead) the weekly newspaper produced by the boys in his barracks. Written by hand and read out loud every Friday evening, the newspaper consisted of essays, poems and short stories as well as a weekly column, Strolls Through Theresienstadt in which Ginz and his friends reported on various parts of the ghetto from the bakery to the morgue. On 28 September 1944 Petr Ginz was put on a train to Auschwitz and sent to his death in a gas chamber immediately upon his arrival, he was 16 years old. His younger sister, Chava Pressburger, who survived Theresienstadt, has recently published Petr Ginz’ diary written in the months prior to his deportation. Petr’s story symbolises the millions of young people whose lives were extinguished by the Nazis. We are grateful to Chava Pressburger and to Yad Vashem for their permission to reproduce some words and an illustration from Petr’s diary:

“When the American space shuttle Columbia was preparing for its takeoff in 2003, the crew included Ilan Ramon from Israel, whose mother had survived the Auschwitz extermination camp. Ilan wanted to take along into space a symbol of the tragedy of the Holocaust. He turned to the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, which aside from many other documents and testaments, stored most of Petr’s preserved drawings.

My brother was a very talented, creative, hardworking, and curious boy with very varied interests. He wrote articles, stories, and several short novels, and he also loved to draw and paint. His drawing Moon Landscape is evidence of Petr’s unusual imagination – and it was this drawing that had been selected by Yad Vashem and by Ilan Ramon to accompany him on his space flight.

The tragic fate of space shuttle Columbia shook the world. The shuttle exploded upon re-entering Earth’s atmosphere on February 1, 2003 – what would have been Petr’s seventy-fifth birthday. Neither Ilan nor the other crew members survived the exploratory flight. A young life that could have made a vast contribution to the progress of mankind ended in just one moment. The death of Israeli astronaut, Ilan Ramon, reawakened the memory of hundreds of thousands of young people who had also stood at the threshold of lives that had been cut short by the Holocaust. Petr Ginz represents and symbolises these young people.”

*The Diary of Petr Ginz, edited by Chava Pressburger, 2007*
Many times at the end of my talks I have often been asked if I had ever revisited Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The usual answer was “no, and I never wished to.” The memories that I carry from there are too hard to comprehend.

Lately I decided that perhaps the time had come for me to make this return journey. An opportunity arose on 28 October 2007 on the occasion of the opening of the Memorial Museum and Documentary Centre at Bergen-Belsen. For the first time since 1945, the horrific atrocities and murders which took place in the former concentration camp were to be presented to the public.

On arrival, the first thing we noticed was that all the survivors are elderly! We were all children at the time aged around 8 to 16 years old; now most of us are 70 years and over. While we are mingling within the group, one is grasping to meet a survivor from one’s block in the camp. There were only about 100 Jewish survivors from the 1943-45 camp present at the ceremony and there were also some POW survivors from Poland and Russia.

I met a lady, now living in England, named Marla who told me she was in block No. 211 with over forty other children saved and cared for by Luba, who became known as the “Angel of Belsen”. Luba saved these children, most of whom were orphans, through her care and sacrifice. She now lives in Miami, Florida, but unfortunately was too frail to attend this event. After the war, Luba’s ‘children’ were dispersed all over the world. Six of the orphans saved by Luba were brought to Ireland by Dr. Bob Collis: Zoltan and his sister, Edit; Suzi and her brother Terry; Franz Berlin and Evelin Schwarz. Hettie Verolme who has written a book called Children’s House of Belsen, greeted me like an old friend, even though we had never met before. The only connection we have is that we were in the same place 63 years ago! She too was saved by Luba.

I was in block No. 207. Later during our visit I met a younger lady who told me she was born in Bergen-Belsen. I was astounded! I asked her how she survived. Many babies were born there but none survived. She explained that she had been born in Bergen-Belsen’s Displaced Persons Camp (DP Camp) after the liberation. She said that she was one of 2,000 babies born between 1945-50 in the Jewish DP Camp.

Next day, Saturday evening I met Rueben Reichsfeld with his sister, who were in the same block as me 63 years ago. We tried to reconcile some of our memories.

Sunday 28 October - Departure for the opening of the new Bergen-Belsen Memorial and Documentary Centre in the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. This was the day I was dreading, my emotions were already taking over at breakfast. The buses are waiting and we are off! We expected the journey to take about three-quarters of an hour, the morning was chilly but beautiful. We travelled alongside forests which were full of autumnal colour. Suddenly I saw for the first time the sign “Bergen-Belsen” – it felt like a knife going through my chest. The realisation hit me that we were going back to a place that was part of the Holocaust.

We pulled into a British Military Camp and I began to recognise the two-story buildings that served as a hospital after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. I was brought here with my Aunt Margo who had been infected with typhoid but there was nothing wrong with me. However the fact that I was with her, helped save her life. These buildings later served as the DP Camp for Jewish prisoners until 1950.

After the ceremony, we boarded the buses again for a short ride to the former site of the concentration camp. We arrived at the site and walked slowly up to an open area with forest all around us. It is now a peaceful, tranquil, beautiful place but for me 63 years too late. When I arrived in 1944 it was ‘hell on earth’. This open area represented an open graveyard. The memories flooded my mind – back then, there were corpses lying all around as far as I could see. The enormity of this place hits one when we pass the mounds of earth which are the Peace, Tranquillity, Beauty – for me 63 years too late.
mass graves each containing thousands of corpses. Each one has a concrete plaque stating the number buried within, 2,500; 1,500; 1000 and on and on. It is in fact, one of the largest cemeteries in Europe. There are over 70,000 murdered victims buried within these mass graves, 20,000 POWs and 50,000 Jews. I had witnessed with my own eyes many of these victims dying a painful and slow death. We saw walking skeletons falling down, never to get up again. We passed some monuments including the grave of Anna Frank and her sister Margot. I stopped for a while. She succumbed to typhoid only a few weeks before liberation. She lived in the block next to ours.

We moved on and stopped at the Jewish memorial monument where Kaddish was recited for the thousands of murdered Jews who had perished in this place. It was the most emotional experience for all of us. Tears were flowing, everyone was in a state of shock and emotion.

We had an additional mission to fulfil. My grandmother died here and we were determined finally to commemorate her and give her a resting place in Bergen-Belsen by placing a plaque on a prearranged concrete block. My brother Miki, cousin Chava and myself stood and recited a poem The Vow, written by the Israeli poet, Abraham Shlonsky. It was our final farewell to our grandmother. We will treasure the moment forever.

We then walked slowly to the new Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum and Documentary Centre. The inside houses historical records of the horrors of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The Museum contains photographic evidence, documentary films, archives which can be viewed on computer terminals, and also some archaeological artefacts. The exhibits are displayed in several sections as one walks through the building. The first section houses the photographic records of the Polish, Russian and Italian POW camp from 1939-43 of whom more than 20,000 died of starvation, cold and disease. The second section displayed the suffering and death of some 50,000 Jewish inmates from 1943-45. One of the photos was taken just in front of our block – the shock of seeing it reminded me of the scene as if it happened yesterday! Nothing was left of the original camp as it was burnt down by the British Army who liberated the camp to stem the outbreak of typhoid. The third section displays the life of the Jewish DP Camp after liberation from 1945-50.

Finally, 62 years after its liberation, Bergen-Belsen is commemorated with this impressive monument and memorial. It gives us hope that after we, the last witnesses pass away, new generations will learn of the horrific past of Bergen-Belsen.

The day was slowly coming to an end but we managed to make one more trip. We organised a taxi to take us to the Bergen-Belsen train station platform where we had arrived 63 years ago. It was 9 November 1944 and I was 9 years old at the time. It is still exactly the same as the day we arrived, even one of the cattle cars is preserved at the site. We recollected our thoughts and memories of that horrific journey – seven days and nights in the cattle-car under horrific conditions. We remembered the frightful night. The SS guards with Alsatian dogs along the platform shouting "heraus, heraus, schnell, schnell. (out, out, quickly, quickly), for the SS it was always quickly, quickly, pushing us along in the rain, cold and mud for over two hours to the concentration camp, seven kilometres away.

The day ended and so my first visit to Bergen-Belsen after 63 years came to an end.

My thoughts are with the victims who did not make it and the suffering that we went through and never talked about for years. It is a past that I would like to forget but I never will.

Tomi Reichental
Holocaust Memorial Day Candle Lighting

It is traditional at Holocaust memorial events to light six candles in memory of the six million Jews who perished in the Shoah. In Ireland we also light candles in memory of all of the other victims of the Holocaust.

**Victim Groups**

**DISABLED VICTIMS:**
In memory of people with disabilities and disabling conditions who were murdered, starved to death and forcibly sterilised by doctors and other willing helpers  
*Candle-lighters:* Deirdre Spain, *Inclusion Ireland* and Gene Lambert, *National Disability Authority*

**GYPSIES:**
In memory of the Roma and Sinti people who were disenfranchised, persecuted and murdered  
*Candle-lighters:* Jon Zatreanu and George Dancea, *Roma Support Group, Ireland*

**HOMOSEXUALS:**
In memory of the homosexual men and women who were persecuted and murdered because of their sexual orientation  
*Candle-lighters:* Victor Coe and Dr. Katherine Zappone

**BLACK and ETHNIC MINORITIES:**
In memory of Black people, Poles, Slavs and other ethnic minorities who were persecuted and murdered  
*Candle-lighters:* Tendai Madondo, *Christian Aid* and Kensika Monshengwo, *National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism*

**POLITICAL VICTIMS:**
In memory of the political opponents of the Nazis – Socialists, Communists, Trade Unionists, Democrats, Masonic organisations and other anti-Nazi victim groups  
*Candle-lighters:* Catherine Byrne, T.D. *former Lord Mayor of Dublin*, and David Begg, *General Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions*

**CHRISTIAN VICTIMS:**
In memory of the Christian victims of all denominations who were persecuted and murdered, many of whom saved and sheltered Jews  
*Candle-lighters:* Sister Breege Keenan, *Vincentian Refugee Centre* and Reverend Chris Hudson

**JEWISH VICTIMS**
Six candles are dedicated to the memory of the six million Jews, including one and a half million children, who were annihilated in the Holocaust by the Nazis and their collaborators. Jews were exterminated in gas chambers, death camps and concentration camps; Jews perished in the ghettos; Jews died of starvation and disease; Jews were shot in the forests and Jews were murdered in the streets and in their homes.  
*Candle-lighters:* These candle-lighters are children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors living in Ireland  
David Phillips, *whose father, Geoffrey, escaped to England with the Kindertransports*  
Sharlette Caplin, *whose late father, Raphael Urbach, survived Buchenwald and Thereisenstandt*  
Siobhan Zinn-Collis, *whose father, Zoltan, survived Bergen-Belsen*  
Joe Katz, *whose late mother, Frieda, survived Auschwitz*  
Zoe Reichental, *whose grandfather, Tomi, survived Bergen-Belsen*  
Rita Evrony, *wife of Israel’s ambassador to Ireland, whose father, Leo Loeffer, survived Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald*
The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland educates and informs about the Holocaust in order to address antisemitism and all forms of racism and intolerance in Ireland.

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland is an independent non-profit national charity. Supporting the work of the Trust provides an opportunity to establish an enduring legacy in honour of the millions who perished in the Holocaust. Through education, the Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland promotes a positive approach to tolerance and diversity.

HETI designs educational programmes and cultural projects for all levels of education and for the general public.

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- The Crocus Project
- Survivors testimony
- School visits to centres of Holocaust education
- Teachers’ Programmes
- Research
- Arts & Culture
- Exhibitions

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Holocaust Memorial Day

HONOURED GUESTS
Mrs Suzi Diamond – Bergen-Belsen
Mr Geoffrey Phillips – Kindertransport
Mr Tomi Reichental – Bergen-Belsen
Mrs Doris Segal – Sudetenland
Mrs Rosel Siev – Aurich, Germany
Mr Zoltan Zinn-Collins – Bergen-Belsen

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Moon Landscape 1942-1944, Petr Ginz (1928-1944), pencil on paper; Gift of Otto Ginz, Haifa; Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem.

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Go home from this place...

Our generation, and the generation or two after us, will be the last that will be able to say that we stood and shook the hands of some of those who survived.

Go home from this place and tell your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren that today in Listowel, you looked into eyes that witnessed the most cataclysmic events ever unleashed by mankind upon mankind. Tell them that you met people who will still be remembered and still talked about and still wept over 10,000 years from now – because if they are not, there will be no hope for us at all.

The Holocaust happened and it can happen again, and every one of us, if only out of our own sense of self-preservation, has a solemn duty to ensure that nothing like it ever occurs again.

Paddy Fitzgibbon
at the unveiling of the Holocaust Memorial