Jews Rescued Jews

Professor Yehuda Bauer's Speech at the WFJCSH Conference

Jerusalem, November 6, 2007

Note:
To our regret, the first few minutes of Professor Bauer's speech were not taped due to some equipment malfunction that had occurred at the time. Dr. Bauer began his presentation by emphasizing that there were a lot of Jewish rescuers whose heroism saved many Jewish lives. As his first example, Professor Bauer introduced the activities of OSE [Oeuvre de Secours Aux Enfants—Children's Aid Society] the organization that started in Russia for the health protection of Jews but later transferred its headquarters to Paris and devoted its efforts to the care and rescue of children.

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And now, to Professor Bauer's recorded speech:

As World War II began and France was occupied by the Germans, they [OSE] concentrated on children—the rescue of children.

Now, there was a problem there: because Jews were known, marked. It was very difficult for Jews to be active. There was a very active branch of OSE in what was, at the beginning, non-occupied France—in other words, the southern part of France where the French collaborationist government under Marshal Petain resided in the resort of Vichy. And the OSE branch there was looking for somebody who would do the work, the practical work.

There was a Jewish electrician in one of the cities in the area, with a completely French name: Georges Garel. It is very likely that his grandfather was called Garelsky, or something like that. But he had a French name—nobody knew that he was Jewish. He was recruited in order to set up an organization to take Jewish children out into the countryside and hide them with French peasants. He established something, which was called "Circuit Garel (?)"—a network. He didn't do it alone—and this was very typical. He did it with the help of a Jesuit priest, Pierre Chayet (?) in Lyon. And with a Jewish convert to Christianity, an abbot—the head of a monastery, with a typical French name: Avraham Glassberg. He never changed his name. He thought of himself as a Jewish Catholic, whatever that means. After the war he helped illegal immigration to Palestine, he organized weapons for the Haganah. But during the war he combined with Chayet and Garel and set up this network. Garel recruited some Jewish girls, but also quite a large number of non-Jewish girls, who scoured the countryside on their bicycles and found peasants who were willing to hide Jewish children. They hid thousands of Jewish children.

Most of these children survived. I would imagine that in this hall there might be a couple of people who were rescued through the "Circuit Garel". Now, you see, this was a cooperation initiated by Jews and helped by sympathetic non-Jews, in order to hide Jewish children and rescue them.

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A parallel existed in Belgium. There was a Committee de Defense Des Juifs (?) (CDJ). A group, again, initiated by Jews. But the head of the Committee was a non-Jewish professor. Again, there was a coming together of Jews and non-Jews.

In Western Europe you could do things like that. It was much more difficult when you came to Eastern Europe. And there were areas, of course, where no initiative could help.

It is only in recent years that recognition has been given to groups of young Zionists, members of the Zionist youth movement in Budapest, who forged documents, who supplied food and medicine, mainly to children's homes, but not only to them, in order to rescue Jewish children. We all know the names of the great rescuers in Budapest, Raoul Wallenberg and Carl Lutz, neutral diplomats. But, they could not have done a thing without the Zionist youth movement. Not a thing! It was the Zionist youth movement, the Zionist underground that managed to give the diplomats the kind of tools with which they could help the Jews. And they themselves also saved large numbers of Jews in the Budapest ghetto How many? Well, the total number of survivors is somewhere in the neighborhood of 80,000. Many of them were rescued by the Jewish initiative.

Let me give you a third example. I think this is perhaps a fascinating one. In Slovakia there was a regime headed by a Catholic priest: a collaborationist regime, fully in line with the Nazis. It was Slovak initiative that caused the deportation of Jews from Slovakia to Auschwitz and to (Lublin?). Not the Germans, but the Slovaks, initiated that deportation. Within that horror, there were groups of people, Jews, who tried to rescue. One group is very well known: it's the Working (?) Group. The head of it was a wonderful woman, Gizi Fleischman, who was helped by her relative, an ultra-orthodox rabbi. She was a Zionist he was an ultra-orthodox rabbi, and they were helped by people who were Zionists, social democrats, and others. It was a committee, the only one in all of Europe, where Jews of all views, from all backgrounds came together in order to rescue others.

But I want to tell you one particular story. I don't think many of you have heard the name of Edward Laufer. He was born in 1895 in a small village of Slovakia. He served as a soldier in the First World War, he was a soldier in the Austrian army. He served in the Balkans. He then was transferred to the Italian front where he was eventually taken prisoner by the Italians. As a prisoner, he joined the Czechoslovak Legion, the people who wanted to create a Czechoslovak republic after the war. So, when the Czechoslovak Republic was founded by Tomas Masaryk in 1918, he was one of the liberators. And then, he went back to Slovakia. Later on he married, had a child and he was living in the town of Nitra. He was a clerk in some establishment there. Then the war came—and the anti-Jewish laws. There was a fascist militia in Slovakia: it was called the Hlinka Guard, Hlinka was the former head of the fascist party in Slovakia (he was dead by then). And the Hlinka Guard began a reign of terror against the Jews in the town of Nitra. They had a curfew: if you were a Jew you could not go out of your house after a certain hour in the evening. One day Laufer's wife went out to do some shopping—she was late coming back. She was caught by a Hlinka guardsman and she was chased back to her home. When they reached her home, and in the presence of her husband, the Hlinka guard took out his whip and

whipped her. Laufer got hold of this guardsman and killed him. He (Laufer) was a sportsman. He turned this fellow's head around and just strangled him. The body was on the ground and now he knew he had to flee. He couldn't stay there. He sent his wife to a friend of his outside of the town, and he himself left to northern Slovakia. He had to find some way of living—and he had to find a new identity. A non-Jewish friend of his got him the *true identity* of another man. In other words, the fellow whose identity he assumed was alive, in a God-forsaken village in the Slovak-Polish border, and Edward Laufer became Teofil Golar (?). A Slovak-Polish peasant man. And as Teofil Golar, he joined the Hlinka Guard. Edward Laufer joined the Hlinka Guard and went to a town in the North of Slovakia and was looking for work. He became a collector of scrap—scrap metals, furniture, clothes, and things like that—on behalf of a fascist Slovak company, and was sent to a small town in northern Slovakia: Kezhmerov (?), which had a large German population (there were German minorities in Slovakia). And Laufer/Golar opened his shop there. A kind of establishment that collected scrap metal and scrap furniture and whatever else, and shipped it to a central place in Slovakia.

As the persecution of Jews became harsher and harsher, Laufer built a wall of scrap metal behind his office and behind that wall he built a room. And into that room, as a fascist Hlinka guardsman (nobody knew that he was Jewish), he collected Jews who were in danger. They thought that he was a fascist guardsman, a "good man", a "good" fascist. And he put them in that back room. At the back of that room there was a door, for escape. If they were found, if there was danger, they could run away. He found a Slovak worker— again, this Slovak did not know that Golar was Jewish—and he said, "Look, I'm getting money to hide these Jews",—he didn't get a penny, of course—"help me to hide them." And this Slovak established a bunker, a hiding place on the outskirts of Kezhmerov, very near the forests of the Tatra Mountains, just a few hundred yards away. And he transferred Jews periodically from his secret room to this bunker. This went on during the deportation of the Jews of Slovakia, in 1942. When the deportation stopped in the summer of 1942 — they stopped for almost two years—he was left with these Jews whom he rescued. What should he do with them? They couldn't go back to legality because they would be immediately caught. And so, with the help of his Slovak worker, he established in the high Tatra Mountain a place of rescue in a tiny village that no German ever visited. And in this tiny village, in this God-forsaken place, this Slovak worker had relatives. At night they would take a horse-drawn wagon and they would transfer these Jews into the mountains. Golar, this man, up into the mountain. They rescued this way several dozens of people. And then, one day there came a knock on Golar's door and the door opened and a man was standing outside and said: "My name is Teofil Golar"… The real Golar has come! "How come that you have my name?", he asked. Then, Laufer made an arrangement with him. He realized that this man was looking for money. He said: "I'm going to pay you a certain amount of money each month. If you betray me, I would say that you knew that I was Jewish and you would be caught as well." The man went back to his village. Golar/Laufer sent him his money. The man came the second time when his money ran out. This time Laufer said: "Look, I'm not going to play games with you. I'm going to give you a lump sum of money, and if you ever come again, I'm going to deliver you to the Germans." That was the end of that.

"Golar" helped not only Jews. He also helped Slovak partisans who were gathering in the mountains and they came to town. They realized that there was a "good" fascist there by the name of Teofil Golar and they came to him. He also followed them into the mountains. But then, he was betrayed by the wife of one of these partisans. The Gestapo came and caught him and put him in prison. He was beaten so badly that he could hardly breathe and he lost his consciousness. When at night he woke up, he found himself in a sack, together with some other prisoner. There were hooks on that sack. Obviously, this was used before for smoking meat. And these hooks were there to put the meat on—and underneath there would be a fire. These hooks went up the sack.

Although he could hardly breathe because his ribs were broken, he climbed up on the hooks, crawled out of the sack, and jumped onto the roof of the building. It was four meters above the ground. He jumped off of the four-meter-high roof and he hit the ground. Because he was a sportsman, he knew how to jump from serious heights. And he ran away, in the middle of the night. He ran to his friend, the Slovak worker, and from there he made his way to a bunker that he had built for just such an emergency; up in the mountain. The bunker was equipped with pictures of Catholic saints, pictures of Hlinka and things like that. So that if somebody found him, he was a "good fascist" up in the mountain.

And while he was there, he also rescued a group of prisoners of the Germans who were brought there to work in the forest. He crept up to them and told them where to go… [to escape].

After the war, they came back to him to thank him.

He rescued another two dozen Jews, simply by telling his Slovak friends to bring them up to him and then to bring them from where he was to the outlying villages in the mountains, where he had friends. He also had a friend among the Slovak partisans. Earlier, this man was a soldier in the fascist Slovak army, a lieutenant. And he had met the "fascists" *Golar*, back in Kezhmerov. But Laufer realized that this man was not really a fascist, he wanted to fight against them. And so they began talking. Laufer presented himself as a lieutenant colonel of the Czechoslovak army, underground—whereupon this lieutenant snapped to attention and said "I will do everything you want, Sir!" And when they were up in the mountain, they met again.

Soon the Czechoslovak army unit within the Soviet Army began liberating the area. When they finally liberated Kezhmerov, Laufer was a "lieutenant colonel of the Czechoslovak army"—supposedly. He then actually joined the army and became a commander of a unit (remember, he was no longer a youngster, he was born in 1895) and he entered Prague with the victorious Soviets in May 1945.

In 1948 he was one of the organizers of the Jewish unit that was sent from Czechoslovakia to fight in our War of Independence. He landed in Israel in the summer of 1948. His wife and child had been murdered by the Germans during the Shoah. He remarried and settled in Netanya. He became the owner of a small industrial establishment there. The interview that I rely on was done in 1964. He died some time in the 1970s at a ripe old age.

Nobody knew about him. It's not that we didn't publish it, but who reads it?

Spread the word! Tell the story! This is just one of them. It's an amazing story—but it is not the only one.

In Poland it was much more difficult, much more difficult. And I'll tell you a story…

You know, none of these stories are easy. They are all very, very complicated. I'll tell you the story: I'm asking you to draw your own conclusions. I'm talking about a small place that is now in Western Byelorussia called Kurenetz. It was called, in Yiddish, Kurnitz. There were two-and-a-half thousand inhabitants there, 1500 of them were Jewish. And before the war there were the usual groups there, you know Zionist groups, and other groups, and so on. There was a Zionist group there, there were eight youngsters in it. Fourteen to seventeen years of age—all boys. When it was still Poland, they had meetings, and things like that. Then the war came and the Soviets occupied that area. And those kids established an "underground". They read Bialik, Hebrew poetry, underneath the Soviet propaganda and stuff. They buried the flag of their movement in the forest, and went out there to sing songs, and other things. Very naïve, very childish. And then, the Germans came. That was the end of naïveté, that was the end of childishness.

There was no ghetto in Kurnitz. The Germans established, on the marketplace, a barbed wire enclosure. And into that, they put each night—we are talking now about July and August, 1941, immediately after the invasion of Russia by the Germans—they put in there thousands of Soviet prisoners of war, whom they had taken prisoner during the first weeks of the invasion. They had taken millions of them and marched them west. And Kurnitz was one of the many places where they established a sort of temporary night's rest. And then they marched them on again, next day. These were people, soldiers, in tattered uniform, terribly sick, wounded—many of them—and terribly, terribly, terribly hungry. At night, they used to bring them barrels of bread and water, never enough, of course. [They would] just bring them inside and throw them at the prisoners of war, who then scrambled to get a piece of bread or a drink of water. Who did this transportation of the barrels? Jewish forced laborers, of course. With armbands marking them as Jews. Among them were these eight youngsters, because they volunteered to do this, they wanted to help these prisoners of war.

Into that enclosure went a young boy, sixteen years of age, one of those boys. I'll give you his real name: Zalman Gurevich was his name. And he went in there with his barrel, and there was a Russian captain. Again, tattered uniform, wounded, hungry. Pyotr Mikhailovich Danilochkin. And he turned to Zalman and said: "Get me out of here!" And Zalman went back out with his empty barrel, and consulted with his friends. And they put on him a second layer of clothes with another armband and he went in with another barrel. He found Danilochkin. Danilochkin took off his uniform, put on the second layer of clothes of Zalman, with the Jewish armband. And for the rest of the night he became a Jewish laborer, bringing in barrels and carrying them out.

When the work was done, they got a kick in their backside, because there was no ghetto there. So what does a young boy, 16 years of age do with a man like that, a Russian? He brought him to his parents. He brought him to his parents, the parents put the Russian up in the attic and nursed him back to health. And after three or four weeks, they found a village, not far away, where there were many Russians, many sympathizers of the Soviet Union. And Danilochkin went there, and established the first Byelorussian partisan detachment. (Dlya Sovetskayu Belarus(?)). He   was the first commander; later he became a *commissar* of this unit. And he did not forget the Jews. First of all, he got these eight youngsters [to join him].

And then, in September 1942, the Germans came and killed the Jews of Kurnitz. By that time there weren't 1500 of them, there were much less, because hundreds of them were taken to forced labor camps elsewhere. 300 of the Jews of Kurnitz escaped. Escaped to where? Escaped to the unit of Danilochkin, to find those eight youngsters who then took them further into the forest. And from there some of them crossed the line into the unoccupied Soviet Union. Many others, mainly women and children, were put into relatively safe partisan areas. All the rest of them joined the partisan units. Many of them died. About half of the three-hundred did not survive the war. So there were about 150 of them from this tiny place, Kurnitz.

It was a rescue of a non-Jew by a Jew. And then the non-Jews rescued Jews and then the Jews rescued Jews. So, you see, it's complicated, difficult.

And you can well ask me: "How on earth do you know this story?". Zalman Gurevich survived, he came to this country, and there is his testimony at Yad Vashem. But only one testimony! You need two—at least—in order to establish that a story is true.

One of the eight survived in Minsk, in Byelorussia. He came to Israel, but much later.

In 1963 a young Byelorussian girl wanted to write an article in a newspaper in Byelorussia about the partisans. They told her that there was this Jew in Minsk who was with the partisans and she should go interview him. And when she got there he said: "You know, my story is nothing unusual. I joined the partisans and I fought and that's that. There is "twenty to a dozen" [of stories like mine]. But there is a man, Pyotr Mikhailovich Danilochkin in another town in Byelorussia. Go to him. He's got a story! And she went there. And she interviewed him. He was absolutely certain that Zalman Gurevich was dead. Zalman Gurevich in Israel was absolutely certain that Danilochkin did not survive. Danilochkin gave her an interview. And the interview reached Israel. And it's exactly the same story. Precisely the same story.

You see, you need to know the context. You need to know, the way that people had to behave in order to survive. Many of them, of course, didn't. Most of them didn't.

But when you think about these things, it's not "why don't we deal more with of Jews rescuing Jews?". Yad Vashem, the place where I work, says that, first of all it has to do with Jewish tradition. Jew rescuing Jew: it's an obligation, it's nothing special, nothing

remarkable. But there is another argument: that if you recognize Jews rescuing Jews, you have the "Mayflower Syndrome". You know, in America *the Mayflower was a huge ocean liner with tens of thousands of people on it. You know, everybody is a "descendant of the Mayflower"*. So you would have everybody and their uncle say; "My relative rescued Jews". So, you have to collect the things. But this has got to be done. You've got to make it clear that the Jews were not an object. The Jews were a subject. The Jews rescued if they could... when they could.

Not everybody did. One of the stories Laufer-Golar told was the story of a Jewish man who was taken prisoner by the Gestapo. He, Laufer, got together a large sum of money to bribe a Gestapo man to let this man go. And the Gestapo man agreed. And Laufer in his uniform, (fascist uniform) went in and took the man and said: "Look, I got you out of here, come with me." And the man refused. "It's too dangerous." He was killed—of course.

So don't mistake these stories! Jews are not more heroes than others. But they are not less heroes than others either. Jews are people who get frightened and endanger their own life with their fear.But Jews also overcome their fear and do amazing things—that you would not believe could be done. You have to see it in a large picture. You have to realize that there are people today in the world who look at the Holocaust only through German eyes. "The Germans did this, the Germans did that, the Germans murdered…Where were the Jews?" The Jews appear only as victims. Only who somebody did *something to*. This is total misunderstanding of the situation. The Jews were victims, that's quite true. But the Jews were not only victims. The Jews were communities, and individuals, with their own culture, their own civilization, their own background, their own dreams and their own future. Many of them did not reach that future.

And they reacted. The way they reacted is frightfully important to us. Because we are their heirs. It doesn't matter if our ancestors never were in Europe; if they come from quite other places. The Jewish community, as such, is the heir of what happened there. And these people were not objects. They were people with their individual gifts, their individual views, opinions, their ways of life, their hopes, their dreams.

We are here not only to perpetuate those dreams but the carry them on.

Thank you