

Seventh International Conference on Holocaust Education

Shoah Education and Remembrance

Dorit Novak, Director, International School for Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem **Remarks at opening session of International Conference on Holocaust Education**

It's the summer of 1942, a short man with a heavy Eastern European accent wanders around the streets of Brussels. In one hand he holds the hand of a 13 year old boy, and in the other, a small bag with the boy's whole life packed inside.

He stops passers-by and asks them, frantic, like a crazy man, "Would you like to take this young boy? Do you want this child?" They shake their heads, turn away in embarrassment and move quickly away. They know exactly what type of child is being offered to them and they definitely do not want to get involved.

Until one woman answers that no, she doesn't want to take the child, but maybe her sister will... her sister, Mrs. Nagel needs money and runs a foster home for children.

The next day, the boy finds himself at the door of the sister's house, standing with his small bag, holding an envelope, waiting for the door to open.

What happened when the door opened, nobody remembers and nobody can tell us, but the boy went into the house, and stayed there until the end of the war.

At around the same time, on the other side of Brussels, Andrea, a young first-grade teacher, discovers that certain pupils are disappearing from her class. She tries to locate their families and realizes that the common factor for the vanishing pupils is the fact that they are Jewish. She decides she must do something.

Together with 12 brave women they joined the "C.D.J." La Comitée De Defence Des Juifs. They were 12 young women who choose to risk their own lives to save Jewish children.

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Not long after Mrs. Nagel opened her door to Henry Andrea contacts her and until the end of the war sends her money, food stamps and even clothes raised by the CDJ, for the young boy hidden in her house.

So now there are two conspirators - one woman who needs money in order to support her family, and another - an educator who has chosen a righteous path. After a while both of them contacted a priest that served as the headmaster of a catholic school in Anderlecht. He then became the only person in the school who knew their secret, accepting Henry as a new student, into his school. In a short meeting he explained the rules: Never admit to your real name and identity, stick to your new name, your new identity, and may God be on our side.

One father, one teacher, one headmaster and maybe a few other people in one neighborhood in Brussels, managed to keep the secret throughout 1942, 1943 and 1944. They managed to keep Henri safe. Once the war ended, Henry found himself alone in the world. He was left with the grave of his father, buried in the Brussels graveyard of the Resistance, and with a picture of his mother who had perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Henri survived thanks to two educators, whose paths had never crossed - a communist woman, and a pious man, both chose not to listen to the voices warning them of the dangers, but rather to their hearts, which clearly told them what constitutes behaving like a human being, and to choose the true way of the educator.

The child that they saved moved to Israel after the war

The child that they saved married

The child that they saved has grandchildren and great-grandchildren

The child that they saved is my father-in-law.

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The conference that we are opening tonight presents us - educators and decision-makers who are responsible for both ourselves and educational networks within our respective countries - with a huge challenge. Not just to choose our own paths as educators, but to mark these paths for others. To retrieve the spirits of one teacher, one principal, and of the many educators who were active throughout Europe during the Holocaust, educators from all religions, educators who chose, in those difficult years, to do what Education requires of them - to teach, to educate by example. Not to talk about what needs to be done, not to plan, deliberate and decide - but to do the decent and correct thing. And as such, to send a timeless message through this example to all of us who have chosen to work in Education.

As time passes, we must revive their stories. The stories of those who chose, through their deeds, to consecrate the "Oath of the Educator", obligating them to the souls and development of their students. This message is one which we must focus on, as a core of society. The Educational system which commits to an ethos of remembrance has a chance at guaranteeing humanity within society.

Our obligation is to influence the face of our education systems, to guarantee that memory will hold an immovable place in the consciousness of educators, as per their oath, something which we can learn from the behavior of many educators during the Holocaust - educators who chose to risk themselves in order to uphold their oath to their pupils. It is our obligation to ensure that this legacy and commitment will be an inseparable part of the educational systems in our countries. We must create the right environment that will encourage the flourishing of Holocaust Education, the guardianship of memory and the adoption of the many meanings and lessons as an obligatory class on human society. As a permanent chapter in our collective memory, and our shared consciousness of the society of tomorrow.

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