

Rescuer of Hundreds of Children Awarded Honorary Citizenship

by Irena Steinfeldt

In April, some 160 Holocaust survivors participating in the International Conference of Children Hidden in Belgium During the *Sboab* were privileged to witness the conferring of honorary Israeli citizenship on Andrée Geulen-Herscovici, a Belgian Righteous Among the Nations. At the end of the ceremony—in the presence of Belgian Ambassador to Israel H.E. Danielle del Marmol, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalev and Yvette Blaiberg Graubart, Director of the Belgian Friends of Yad Vashem—the survivors gathered around the tiny bright-eyed woman, enveloping her in love. Even after so many years, she remembered each and every one. Zvi Novak, who was 13 when his father entrusted him in the hands of a Belgian family, related how, many years after the war, his friend introduced him to Madame Geulen during a visit to Brussels with his wife. Until that point, Novak had never heard of Geulen. She asked his name, and when he answered, she looked at him for a long time. “1059,” she finally whispered. That was his number on her coded list, and that is how Novak discovered that it was Geulen who had made sure he was well taken care of by the Belgian family after his parents were sent to Auschwitz. As they spent more time together, Novak was able to fill in other vital missing details of his life.

When Belgium was occupied by the Germans in 1942, Andrée Geulen was a young teacher. While many Belgians stood idly by during the persecution of the Jews, Geulen decided to act. “I understood that my pupils didn’t need more French lessons; they needed someone to defend their lives,” she explains. She joined the Jewish rescue organization, the Committee for the Defense of the Jews, and for more than two years, placed hundreds of Jewish children with Christian families and in monasteries, putting herself in mortal danger time and time again. She continued to visit the children, making sure all their needs were being met. In secret, she also kept a record of their original names and assumed identities so that upon liberation she could continue her work, albeit in reverse—locating the children and, where possible, returning them to their families.

Twenty-six years after she was recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations, Andrée Geulen took part in the official state ceremony marking Holocaust Remembrance Day at Yad Vashem, and visited the Holocaust History Museum—where part of her Holocaust-era list of names is displayed. But the ceremony at which she was giving honorary citizenship was the pinnacle of her visit.

Speaking on behalf of those present, Zvi Novak summed up their feelings towards her. “Madame Geulen, we bestow upon you and all those who were part of your brave enterprise our esteemed thanks and recognition. I am here with my wife, my children and my grandchildren—and I am grateful that they too understand what you did for them.”

The author is Director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department.



Belgian Righteous Among the Nation and Honorary Israeli Citizen Andrée Geulen-Herscovici (left) with survivor Henri Lederhandler next to the display of her story in the Holocaust History Museum

New Righteous from Norway, the Netherlands, Poland

At the beginning of June, Yad Vashem was honored to host three Righteous Among the Nations ceremonies. The first, on 3 June, posthumously recognized Per Faye-Hansen of Norway for his efforts in hiding Jews in Norway and assisting in their escape to Sweden. His daughters Gro Weneske Faye-Hensen, who resides in Israel, and Kari Danielsen from Norway received the medal and certificate on behalf of their late father.

On Wednesday 6 June, a ceremony posthumously recognizing five Dutch Righteous Among the Nations took place in the Yad Vashem Synagogue in the presence of their children, as well as survivors. Those honored were: Albartha and Klaas Crum, who hid the Cohen Paraira family for a year and a half in their home in Rhenen; Dirk Kroon, who sheltered Jews in his apartment in Soest, and as a member of the Westerweel resistance group helped other Jews as well; and Klaas and Hendrika van der Knoop, who protected Jews in their home throughout the war.

The following day, Jan and Maria Michalowski, Tadeusz and Wladyslawa Korsak, and Maria Burdowa were posthumously honored as Righteous Among the Nations for hiding Jews during the Holocaust. Children and grandchildren of the Polish couples and nieces of Burdowa arrived from Poland to accept the medals and certificates on behalf of their late parents and aunt. Also attending the ceremony were Polish Ambassador to Israel H.E. Agnieszka Magdziak Miszewska and survivors rescued by those honored.



Andrzej Michalowski (left) accepts the Righteous Among the Nations certificate for his late parents Jan and Maria Michalowski from Director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department Irena Steinfeldt.

