

by Irena Steinfeldt

Although over 60 years have passed since the Holocaust, survivors continue to approach Yad Vashem with requests that their rescuers be honored as Righteous Among the Nations. However, as the war sinks deeper into the past, recalling detailed information becomes more difficult, representing a complex challenge for staff at the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations. Completing the picture entails

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considerable research and, at times, no small amount of detective work.

In April 2005, Arnold Van Der Horst submitted a request to Yad Vashem for recognition of his wartime rescuers. With the aid of the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names he had learned that his parents, Yaacov and Yehudit Van Der Horst, had been murdered in Auschwitz in January 1944. Arnold, then a young boy, had been hidden with a family in Arnhem, Holland. The information he was able to provide to Yad Vashem was vague: the name of the rescuing family as he recalled it turned out to be inexact. He did not remember the first names of the parents, but was able to provide the names of their four children.

"I would like to correct a wrong after all these years, but I don't know how."

The only physical artifact he still owned was a picture of himself at a birthday party. Nannie Beekman, the Righteous Department's Netherlands expert, began her search by contacting the Dutch governmental authority that handled orphans during the postwar period. Through that organization's archives she obtained

Arnold's personal record and the precise names of his rescuers. Not only were Hendrika and Johann Holthaus consequently recognized as Righteous Among the Nations, but Beekman's investigation also helped Arnold piece together the story of his childhood.

Katya Gusarov deals with rescuers from the Former Soviet Union and Baltic states. One day she received a letter from a Ukrainian woman who related that her

Designation of the Righteous Among the Nations, themselves all volunteers, decided to accord recognition to the two rescuers: Yurechko and Jagiellowicz.

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Medal presented by Yad Vashem to Righteous Among the Nations

Bozenna Rotman, herself the daughter of a Righteous Among the Nations, handles Polish cases.

Recently, Rotman was able to obtain the testimony of a survivor in a file that had been

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open for twenty years. Based on the testimony, the rescuers could finally be recognized. "Some cases remain open for long periods of time, but we ensure that every shred of information is investigated and registered," says Nona Agababian-Nir, who coordinates the Righteous Commission's work and is in charge of computerization. While more than 22,000 Righteous Among the Nations have been recognized to date, staff in the Department remain committed to seeing through each and every case.

The author is Director of Yad Vashem's Department for the Righteous Among the Nations.

Ceremonies Around the World Honor Righteous Among the Nations

Since 1963, more than 22,000 non-Jews from over 40 different countries have been awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations, the highest honor given by the State of Israel to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. These men and women hail from all kinds of backgrounds—from poor farmers to established diplomats, from ordinary citizens to church leaders. Every year hundreds of people are honored with this award both at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and abroad via Israel's diplomatic representatives in cooperation with Yad Vashem's Friends associations. Medals and certificates of honor are presented to the rescuers or their next of kin at special ceremonies, often attended by government representatives.

In 2007, over 450 new Righteous Among the Nations were recognized by Yad Vashem. Following are a few events that took place over the year in their honor:

On 18 January, a plaque paying tribute to the French Righteous Among the Nations was unveiled by the President of France at the Panthéon in Paris, where France's heroes are honored.



On 18 May a state ceremony honoring the Righteous Among the Nations from Belgium was held in Brussels. Belgium's Prime Minister unveiled a special plaque.

On 6 September, the title of Righteous Among the Nations was bestowed upon the late Yevgenia Zamoroko-Lysenko from Ukraine. The ceremony was held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,



and H.E. Mr. Sallai Meridor, Ambassador of Israel to the United States, presented the medal and certificate of honor to her son Nikolay Zamoroko, who lives in Maryland, USA.



On 28 September, H.E. Mr. Amos Nadai, Israel's Ambassador to China, bestowed commemorative citizenship of the State of Israel upon Dr. Feng Shan Ho zhi, a Chinese diplomat posted in Vienna during WWII who saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. The ceremony was held in Dr. Ho's hometown of Yiyang, Hunan Province, China, in the presence of his daughter Manli Ho.



On 30 October, a ceremony was held in the Sukkat Shalom synagogue in Belgrade, Serbia, bestowing upon six individuals the title of Righteous Among the Nations. The President of Serbia, Mr. Boris Tadić, attended the ceremony. Also present were Israel's Ambassador to Serbia H.E. Mr. Arthur Kol, Honorary President of the Union of Jewish Communities in Serbia Mr. Aca Zinger, the extended families of the rescuers, Christian, Muslim and Jewish clergymen, the diplomatic corps and members of the Jewish community.

In some cases, relatives of rescuers choose to come to Israel to receive the medals and certificates at Yad Vashem. Below are some of these special events held during 2007:

On 11 October, Elisabeth Hedwig Leja Gessler, a Righteous Among the Nations from Germany, was posthumously honored at a special ceremony at Yad Vashem.



Throughout the war, Gessler looked after Elek, Lili and Roman, the three children of Edward and Dora Gessler,

whom she had worked for as a nanny and housekeeper. After the war, Elisabeth remained with the children and Edward, whom she married in 1965. Pictured: Director of the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations Irena Steinfeldt (right) presents the medal and certificate to Lili and Roman Gessler.

On 25 October, the Chairman of the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous, former Supreme Court Justice



Jacob Türkel (second from right), presented the award to the children of the late Hendrikus (Hein) and Martha Snapper from the Netherlands, who saved Rosa de

Hartog during the Holocaust. The ceremony was attended by Holocaust survivors Truus de Hartog (Netherlands) and Salomon de Hartog (Israel) and five children of the rescuers: Jerry, Jan, Johan, Hans and Frank (also pictured), of California and Kentucky, USA.

On 4 November, the honor of Righteous Among the Nations was awarded to the late Stanislaw and Jadwiga Schultz



from Ukraine, who hid Jews in their home during the war. Stanislava Andryshchak, the Schultz' daughter who flew in especially for the ceremony, was

presented with the medal and certificate in her parents' honor. Pictured, center: Stanislava Andryshchak and survivor Meir Lamet from the USA, with members of Lamet's extended family