

Part of the Family



Part of the Family

*Christadelphians, the Kindertransport,
and Rescue from the Holocaust*

Volume 1



JASON HENSLEY

“Part of the Family” is an ongoing project attempting to catalogue the lives and experiences of the Jewish refugees who lived with Christadelphians during the 1930s and 1940s. To that end, if readers know of anyone who could possibly be included in a further work, or if they or their family were Jewish refugees who were sheltered by Christadelphians and would like to have their story published, please contact the author at iwaspartofthefamily.com

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To Dante, Kezia, Leah, Moriah, and Rachel

I know not whether the men, who at present contrive the foreign policy of Britain, entertain the idea of assuming the sovereignty of the Holy Land, and of promoting its colonization by the Jews; their present intentions, however, are of no importance one way or the other; because they will be compelled, by events soon to happen, to do what, under existing circumstances, heaven and earth combined could not move them to attempt...The finger of God has indicated a course to be pursued by Britain which cannot be evaded, and which her counsellors will not only be willing, but eager, to adopt when the crisis comes upon them...To Britain, then, the prophet calls as the protector of the Jewish nation in the evening-tide trouble, and commands it to send its messengers in swift vessels because the crisis is urgent, and to plant Israel as 'an ensign upon the mountains' (Isa. 18:3).

JOHN THOMAS

Elpis Israel

1849

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PREFACE

In 2014, I received an invitation from a friend to attend the Belfer National Conference for Educators at the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum in July of 2015. Our family already had plans to visit the East Coast that year, and as the dates coincided, attending the conference was feasible. A few months later, I found myself in Washington, D.C.

This book is a direct result of that conference.

The Belfer National Conference for Educators is a three-day training program for English and history teachers. The instructors are also English and history teachers, ones who have been specifically trained in a museum fellowship program to teach about the Holocaust. The idea behind the conference is to educate educators on how to appropriately teach the Holocaust, and to that end, the museum emphasizes 10 methodological guidelines. Although a number of these guidelines were helpful in writing this text, one of them in fact inspired it: avoid simple answers to complex questions.

When teaching about the Holocaust, educators need to be aware that it was an incredibly complex event without easy answers. Thus, while we as teachers so often like to speak in generalities, the real memory of the Holocaust, and the real life-changing lessons of the Holocaust truly begin to surface when we examine the stories of the individuals. Indeed, the Holocaust was a tragedy for millions of Jews, yet it was also a tragedy for millions of Jewish *individuals*. Each of those individuals has a story and an experience that was different from that of his or her neighbor. Those stories need to be told.

Therefore, while at the conference, we were encouraged to investigate further and to ask more questions. I was encouraged to look at the stories. In our last activity together, a man named Glenn Kurtz came to speak with us about a book, *Three Minutes in Poland*, that he had written and an adventure he had embarked upon after finding an old home movie in his grandparents' closet. This movie became the touchstone for a number of fascinating experiences. He discovered the location of the movie: a small town in Poland. He began to unearth the history of the town, learning that it had been completely destroyed by the Nazis. And most astonishingly, he met a man who had lived in that town, had survived the Holocaust, and who began to identify people in the film.

I was awed by his story of discovery.

I am not sure when I first heard about Christadelphians and the Kindertransport, but it was on that day—the last day of the Belfer Conference—that I knew I should know more. This became my first step in writing this book.

A few months passed, and I received an e-mail from Jen Goss, one of my instructors from the Belfer Conference. We had been corresponding about various Holocaust-related topics when I received a note from her, mentioning that the Echoes and Reflections training program, a course born out of the partnership between the Anti-Defamation League, the USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem, was looking for middle school or high school teachers to pilot its new online training module. I signed up.

This book is a direct result of that training.

Echoes and Reflections is another course for teachers about teaching the Holocaust—and one of the unique things about it

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is the use of visual history. With the assistance of the USC Shoah Foundation, a number of survivor testimonies—videos of survivors telling their stories—are integrated into the curriculum. Survivors’ individual experiences are brought together to make an impression on the students.

Once again, there was an emphasis on the individual.

At the end of this program, trainees had to create a final project, a lesson they would present to their students. This assignment served as the final push I needed to begin conducting my research, and to build a unit on Christadelphians and the Holocaust. I had known that Christadelphians helped the Jews during WWII—but I had never known to what extent. The Belfer Conference inspired me to search this out further and to carry out my own research. Echoes and Reflections gave me a deadline by which I needed to begin.

Thus, the seeds of this project were planted in the research that would become my final project.

Since then, this book has had its own story. As with Glenn Kurtz, who began by unearthing history, making connections, and reuniting individuals, I too have had my own share of simply astonishing experiences. In one instance, a refugee had never learned what had happened to her father—only that he had been sent “to the East.” This research uncovered her father’s fate and answered a question over which she had agonized for 70 years.

In another instance, I was privileged to interview a survivor now living in Australia. Just two days after that interview, I received an e-mail from a Christadelphian in London stating that he had recently digitized his father’s home movies and that, while going through one such movie, he spotted two

Jewish refugees but was uncertain who they were. It turned out that one was the man I had just interviewed the previous Thursday and that I was able to identify him: we had just discovered a home movie of him and his sister that neither of them had ever seen.

Research can yield incredible results, but the human connections, the people you meet, and the friends that you make through it are precious, too.

Thus, although this book discusses the Holocaust in some generalities—it is, after all, a book about what the Christadelphians in general did to save Jews during the Holocaust—the book mainly tells the story of individuals involved. Where it has been possible, I have attempted to find and tell the experiences of Jewish men and women who, when children, were rescued from the Nazis and housed and supported by Christadelphians.

As a Christadelphian, I inevitably bring certain biases to my research. In writing this book, I have attempted to put those biases aside and simply tell the stories. I have contacted refugees whose experiences with Christadelphians were entirely positive, and a very few whose experiences were tarnished with grief and frustration—not only because they were in a new country with a new culture and a new language but also because of their Christadelphian foster families. Nevertheless, every refugee I spoke with expressed gratitude to those Christadelphian families who had been willing to open their homes to complete strangers to preserve their lives from the flames of the Nazi horror. In other words, I did attempt to check my biases—but the feelings I encountered through my discussions with Jewish refugees were, while occasionally marked by tales of frustration or bitterness with Christadelphians (both personally and communally), overwhelmingly positive.

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Prior to the book's publishing, each refugee's story was read by the refugees themselves and/or their family members and, in many cases, by the Christadelphian families that housed the refugees. I sought approval, and received it, for each individual story. I took these actions with the hope of ensuring that the record presented in these pages is as close to historical truth and as bias-free as possible.

In telling these stories, the first portion of this book examines the general Christadelphian response to the Holocaust. The second portion conveys those experiences of the individual refugees—in an attempt to show that ultimately, history cannot simply be remembered in batches of statistics and generalities but rather should be seen and understood through the lens of the individuals who genuinely lived this history. Indeed, this book is their story.