



Compassion

Olga Rajsek

Zagreb, Croatia... 1942 – After Germany and its allies invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, they carved the country into zones of occupation, with Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria each taking a portion. In the northern part of the country, the Germans and Italians created the fascist puppet state of Croatia. The pro-Nazi *Ustashe* regime immediately launched a reign of terror against “foreign elements” within the country, some 2 million Serbs, 40,000 Jews, and 30,000 Roma (Gypsies). In their assault on the Jews, the regime first enacted laws that isolated them from society, both economically and socially. In June 1941, mass arrests began. By the end of that year, the *Ustashe* had imprisoned nearly two-thirds of the Jews of Croatia in concentration camps that they had built throughout the country. The largest such camp complex was Jasenovac, located about 60 miles west of the city of Zagreb.

Zagreb was home to about 11,000 Jews, including the Stockhamer family. Shortly after the Axis invasion in 1941, eight-year-old Dan Stockhamer learned that his father and uncle had been captured as war prisoners. A year later, Dan and his mother were sent to a concentration camp. Dan’s grandfather was able to secure the boy’s release and brought him to the home of Olga Rajsek in Zagreb. Olga, a Christian, was the fiancée of Dan’s imprisoned uncle, Zlatko Neumann. Unaware of Zlatko’s fate and distraught about Dan’s safety, Olga sought to do what she could to help. She took Dan into her home and hid him for months.

Around neighbors, Olga passed Dan off as her cousin. One family that supported the *Ustashe* became suspicious and questioned the boy about his identity when they invited him into their home. They realized that Dan was a Jew. They reported him to the authorities and he was taken to a local prison. Olga pleaded for Dan’s release. After little success, she approached Bishop Alojzije Stepinac, the head of the Catholic Church in Croatia, who had begun to publicly criticize the regime’s policies against the Jews and the Serbs. Stepinac intervened and was able to get Dan released from prison.

However, Dan was arrested and taken away again. This time with the help of a friend, Olga was able to get him out and had him placed in an orphanage that was caring for the children of partisans (resistance fighters). Olga continued to care for Dan, bringing him food every day and taking him to her home on weekends. The suspicious neighbors had moved away, but Olga pretended that Dan was the child of a partisan just to be safe. The boy often asked for his mother, who had been killed months earlier in a concentration camp.

When the war ended in the spring of 1945, Olga took Dan from the orphanage and brought him back to her house. Dan’s father and uncle were released from prison. Dan was reunited with his father. Olga Rajsek and Zlatko Neumann, Dan’s uncle, were married.

THE JEWISH FOUNDATION *for the righteous*

The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous provides financial support to Christians and Muslims who rescued Jews during the Holocaust and preserves their legacy through its national Holocaust education program.

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Hasmik and Tigran Tashtshiyan

Simferopol, Ukraine... 1941 – In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact, each agreeing that it would not attack the other. On June 22, 1941, Germany broke the agreement and launched Operation Barbarossa, the largest German military operation of World War II. More than three million soldiers from Germany and more than half a million from its allies participated in the invasion. The Soviet army was caught off guard, and German forces rapidly advanced eastward. Following the German army into Soviet territory were the *Einsatzgruppen*, mobile killing squads charged with the task of shooting Communist officials, partisans (resistance fighters), and racial enemies, including Jewish men – and ultimately Jewish women and children as well.

On September 19, 1941, the Germans entered Kiev, the capital of the Soviet republic of Ukraine. On November 1, they occupied Simferopol, a Ukrainian city on the Crimean peninsula, near the Black Sea. By the time they reached Simferopol, most of the 20,000 Jews living there had fled. Jewish refugees from other regions of Ukraine, however, had come to the city as German forces moved farther into Soviet territory. When the Germans arrived in Simferopol, they ordered the more than 14,000 Jews in the city to register with Nazi authorities and to wear arm bands displaying the star of David. *Einsatzgruppe* D established its regional headquarters there.

In November and December of 1941, thousands of Jews were rounded up, loaded onto trucks, taken to the outskirts of the city, and shot. Among those killed were the grandparents of Rita and Anatoly Golberg. The children's mother, Eugenia, knew that Rita and Anatoly would likely be killed as well and sought to find a place to hide them. She had to look no further than the house next door, where the Tashtshiyan family lived.

Eugenia pleaded with her neighbors to shelter Rita and Anatoly. Survivors of the Armenian genocide during World War I, the Tashtshiyans sympathized with the Golbergs and understood the dire circumstances they faced. They immediately offered to take in the two Jewish children, even though it meant endangering the lives of their own children, Hasmik and Tigran. Their assistance could not have come at a more crucial time.

From December 11 to 13, *Einsatzgruppe* D rounded up and murdered the remaining 12,500 Jews of Simferopol. They did not find Rita and Anatoly Golberg. Hasmik and Tigran had built several hiding places for them – one in the attic, one in the basement, and one in the shed outside their house – and the two Jewish children went undetected. Hasmik and Tigran shared their food and clothing with Rita and Anatoly and cared for them until April 1944, when Simferopol was liberated by the Soviet Army. Eugenia Golberg survived the war and reunited with her children after liberation.

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