

"WHOEVER SAVES A SINGLE LIFE IS AS IF ONE SAVES THE ENTIRE WORLD."—TALMUD

## HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

*The following should be read after singing Dayyenu.*

**READER:** Throughout the year, we remember how despots have sought the exile and annihilation of the Jewish people. At *Pesach*, we tell of Pharaoh. At *Hanukkah*, of Antiochus. At *Purim*, of Haman. At *Yom HaShoah*, of Hitler. We speak of past oppressors, hoping that through awareness we may prevent future tyrants from attaining power.

But we also give thanks for those in every generation who came forward to lead our people out of the darkness. We recognize heroic rescuers from every generation, hoping that the memory of their strength will fortify us if confronted with similar evil.

**READER:** We remember Moses, who, with both vision and courage, led his people from slavery to freedom. We remember the Maccabees, whose strength and determination saved the Temple and Jewish life in the Land of Israel. We remember Esther, who interceded to save fellow Jews from destruction.

While we commemorate the heroes of the past, we also remember modern heroes who saved Jews from the Holocaust.

**TOGETHER:** During this dark time, there were those who had the courage to care – non-Jews who risked their lives, and often the lives of their families, to save Jews from death. Just as we tell of Moses leading our people to freedom, at our *Seder* we also tell of contemporary heroes and how they led Jews to their freedom more than seventy-five years ago.

**READER:** At this Passover *Seder* we recount the story of Melpomeni Gianopoulou (GI-AN-O-POO-LOU), a Righteous Gentile from Veria, Greece, who with her sisters and another family, saved the Mordechai family.

**READER:** Mentos Mordechai, his wife Miriam, known as Marie, and five children, Sara, Asher, Shmuel, Rachel, and Yossi lived in Veria, Greece. Mentos owned a business, his wife had a dress shop and gave sewing lessons. Germany occupied Greece on April 6, 1941. With the arrival of the Germans, the persecution of the Jews began.

Evlambia Axiopoulos had worked in the Mordechai home. When Yossi was born in August 1942, Marie did not have milk. Evlambia, who had given birth to a baby girl around the same time, became a wet nurse for Yossi. Evlambia came regularly to the Mordechai home to feed Yossi.

**READER:** Evlambia's brother, Nikos, traveled from Veria to Thessaloniki to obtain false identity cards for the Mordechai family, only to find that the Jews of Thessaloniki were being deported. Nikos warned the Mordechai family that the next transport of Jews was due in a few days and the train was scheduled to stop in Veria to collect the Jews of Veria. Nikos, who was a carpenter, built a false ceiling in the attic of the old abandoned Turkish mosque where he was living with his family. Marie and the children moved into the mosque before Passover 1943 and remained hidden there for more than a year. Mentos Mordechai hid with a friend from the army.



*Melpomeni Gianopoulou*

**READER:** The Jews of Veria were rounded up on May 1, 1943. The living conditions in the mosque were unbearable. The place that Nikos built was very small, with no holes for air or sunlight. The Mordechai family developed health problems and a new hiding place needed to be found, one that provided access to fresh air.

**READER:** Efthimia Gianopoulou stepped forward to help the family. Before the war, Efthimia studied to be a seamstress with Marie. Since Efthimia was very poor and an orphan, Marie did not charge her for the lessons. When a new hiding place was needed, Efthimia arranged for the entire Mordechai family to move into her two-room apartment which she shared with her sisters, Melpomeni and Bithleem.

The sisters shared everything with the family, most importantly food. Shmuel, who was six years old, became very ill and died. Shortly after Shmuel died, they were denounced to the Germans. Relatives of the sisters helped the family to escape. They took Sara, the eldest daughter, to the woods. Marie took the two youngest, Rachel and Yossi, to hide in the mountains. Asher escaped to the mountains on his own. After several days of being separated, the family was reunited in the mountains. They hid in a pigsty where they remained until the area was liberated in December 1944.

**READER:** While they survived the war, more than seventy-five members from the Mordechai family were murdered in Auschwitz.

**READER:** Melpomeni, the only surviving member of her family, is 92 years old and lives in Thessaloniki.

**TOGETHER:** Let the story of Melpomeni Gianopoulou (GI-AN-O-POO-LOU) inspire us to do right when faced with evil.

**READER:** How can we pass this spirit on to future generations?

**READER:** Let us honor rescuers like Melpomeni by learning from her deeds and dedicating ourselves anew to fulfilling the traditional Jewish commandment to be responsible for the safety and well-being of our neighbors.

**READER:** Let us also honor these rescuers by dedicating ourselves to assisting those among them who need our help. As Jews, we must ensure that these heroes live out their remaining years in dignity – with adequate food, medicine and housing. We each have the ability to make an enormous difference in their lives.

**READER:** Tonight, let us commit to learning the stories of these righteous men and women who saved thousands of Jews from death. Let us also commit to making these stories a part of our *Seder*. As we recall those who rose up against us in every generation, let us also remember those who stood apart from the evil. On this night of Passover, we recall Shifra and Puah, the two Egyptian midwives who defied Pharaoh's edict to drown the male children of Israel in the Nile. We recall the daughter of Pharaoh who violated her father's decree to drown the infants and who reached out to save Moses. Just as we remember and praise these first rescuers of Jewish children, let us ensure that the stories of those non-Jews who rescued Jewish children and adults during the Holocaust are remembered and passed down to our children and our children's children.

## A POSTSCRIPT TO MELPOMENI GIANOPOULOU'S RESCUE STORY

The JFR reunited Melpomeni with Sara and Yossi Mordechai in Jerusalem in November 2019. They had not seen each other in years. The documentary retelling their story can be viewed on the JFR website – [www.jfr.org/reunion2019](http://www.jfr.org/reunion2019).

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**About the JFR** – The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) was established in 1986 by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis to fulfill the traditional Jewish commitment to *hakarat hatov*, the searching out and recognition of goodness. The JFR honors and supports Righteous Gentiles, non-Jews, Christians and Muslims, who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The Foundation provides monthly support to some 235 aged and needy rescuers in 18 countries. Through its national education program, the Foundation also preserves the legacy of the Righteous and educates teachers and students about the history of the Holocaust.

In the past twenty-eight years, the JFR has distributed more than \$41 million to aged and needy rescuers. We must continue to thank and support these extraordinary individuals who were the lone lights in the darkness.

In sharing the stories of the Righteous, we strive not only to honor their place in history, but also to stress the importance of their example for these times. These men and women remind us that in the midst of unspeakable evil, each human being has the capacity to act humanely and to make a difference, a lesson that is often eclipsed by the legacy of hatred, brutality, and suffering that dominates contemplation of the Holocaust.

*For more information about the work of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous or to learn more about other rescuers like Wladyslaw Misiuna please visit our website at [www.jfr.org](http://www.jfr.org) or contact us at the address listed below.*

80 MAIN STREET, SUITE 380, WEST ORANGE, NJ 07052-5438  
973.736.1800 FAX: 973.736.1119 [JFR@JFR.ORG](mailto:JFR@JFR.ORG) [WWW.JFR.ORG](http://WWW.JFR.ORG) [WWW.JFR.ORG/BLOG](http://WWW.JFR.ORG/BLOG)