

THE JEWISH FOUNDATION *for the righteous*

"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.

Nevertheless, 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 the Ruzgys family, Leokadija and her three children, Egle, Meile, and Aurimas, who saved the Katz family from Lithuania.

READER: Israel Katz lived with his wife, Bertha, and two children, Mary and Leibel, in Giedraiciai, Lithuania. They lived above their store. One of his customers was Leokadija Ruzgiene, a widow from the nearby village of Dudenai. She lived on a farm with her daughters, Egle and Meile, and son, Aurimas. Leokadija earned her living as a seamstress. The families were friends, and the children would often play together.


READER: When Germany invaded Lithuania in June 1941, life changed. Leibel was taken from the Katz home by Lithuanian collaborators and was marched to the forest where he was killed. A week later, Israel was also brought to the forest to be killed but managed to escape. Realizing what lay in store for the rest of his family, he sought shelter and arranged for his wife and twelve-year-old daughter, Mary, to join him.



*Meile, Leokadija, Egle,
and Aurimas Ruzgys*

READER: Shortly after his wife and daughter joined him, Israel realized that they could not trust the woman with whom they were staying. In mid-July 1941, they left in the middle of the night and walked to the Ruzgys farm. They knocked at the side window and asked Leokadija if they could stay for the night. She said yes. A hole was dug under a cabinet in the kitchen where Israel hid with his wife and daughter. The Ruzgys family hid the Katz family for more than three years.

READER: After hiding the Katz family for three years, they were denounced by neighbors. The Lithuanian police came to the Ruzgys home and arrested Leokadija, Mary, and her parents. They were taken to the prison in Ukmerge. The Ruzgys children were left alone in the house. With their uncle, they sold the few items they had, including their mother's sewing machine, so they could bribe the prison officials to keep their mother and the Katz family alive.



READER: Leokadija and the Katz family spent six months in the Ukmerge prison before the Soviet army liberated the area. Leokadija, Mary, and her parents returned to the farm together, and they were reunited with Egle, Meile, and Aurimas. After liberation, the Katz family returned to their home in Giedraiciai. Fearing for their lives from their neighbors for having saved Mary and her parents, Leokadija and her children had to flee their home. They went to Giedraiciai and were taken in by Israel Katz. When the Katz family left Lithuania for the United States, they gave their home to Leokadija and her children. Today, Leokadija's granddaughter lives in the former Katz home. Egle, who is 95, and Aurimas, who is 94, continue to live in Lithuania. Mary lives in the United States and remains in touch with Egle and Aurimas.

TOGETHER: Let the story of Leokadija, Egle, Meile, and Aurimas 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 the Ruzgys family by learning from their 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.

About The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

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, who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The Foundation provides monthly support to aged and needy rescuers in 10 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 thirty-one years, the JFR has distributed more than \$45 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 about other rescuers like Leokadija, Egle, Meile, and Aurimas, please visit our website at www.jfr.org or contact us at the address listed below. In 2011, the JFR produced a documentary on the Ruzgys family and Mary Katz, you can view the documentary at <https://jfr.org/video-library/reunion-2011/>.