

## Children saved from Holocaust by 'Underground Railroad' Reunite

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More than 1,000 children were saved from almost certain death during the Holocaust through an "underground railroad" operation in the United States. Most Americans and American Jews know nothing about this uplifting chapter in the darkest time in history — when 1.5 million other children perished. Many of those who were saved went on to achieve public fame in America. For example, one became an American ambassador, another a rock 'n' roll impresario, and still another a Nobel laureate. These children — now in their 70s and 80s — met one another at the "One Thousand Children" (OTC) first reunion, a conference within the larger Living the Legacy conclave, held in late June in Chicago. Co-founded by Iris Posner and Lenore Moskowitz, One Thousand Children Inc. is a nonprofit research and education organization dedicated to documenting the rescue that saved more than 1,200 children before and during the Holocaust. "This reunion is a culmination of 2 ½ years of work which began with trying to find the names of the children, locating the children, [discovering] how they were rescued, and learning about their adult lives," said Posner, OTC president. "The reunion brings to life, to the American consciousness, and into American history this particular event."

The OTC rescue — made an underground operation because of antisemitic and isolationist forces working against it — succeeded because of donations from American citizens and organizations, and the work of hundreds of volunteers. During the rescue operation, Jewish and some non-Jewish children traveled to the United States in small groups for 11 years, from 1934 to 1945. In America, they were assigned to live with foster families, sometimes their own relatives. Rescue workers hoped that the children would be reunited with their parents at the war's end. Sadly, most of the children lost one or both parents and other relatives during the Holocaust.

The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago aided the OTC effort and saved some 75 children during the war. Manfred Steinfeld, a Chicago Jewish community leader and philanthropist, was one such child. Born in a small town in Germany, his father died before the war, and his mother was left raising two sons and a daughter by herself. When the situation was deteriorating in Germany in 1938, Steinfeld's

mother faced the opportunity to send her two sons out of Europe — her younger son to Palestine and Steinfeld to the United States.

That year, at age 13, Steinfeld arrived in Chicago, thanks to the assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the Jewish Children's Bureau (JCB) of the Jewish Federation in Chicago. He moved into an apartment in the city with his aunt and six other relatives. He later learned that his mother and sister were deported to Latvia in 1941 and died in the Stutthof concentration camp. At the close of the war, Steinfeld and the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division translated the unconditional surrender document of Nazi forces east of the Elbe River. After the war, he married and had children and soon traveled with them to Europe to tour the concentration camps. "I made up my mind at that time that I'm not going to participate in a 'Generation of Silence,' but mine was going to be a 'Generation of Reflection,'" he said. In his adult life, Steinfeld went on to become a successful businessman and founded the world's leading manufacturer of chairs for hotels, restaurants, offices, and stores. In 1954, he made his first gift to the Jewish Federation — \$50 — and hasn't stopped giving since. Steinfeld has held just about every position available to him at the Federation, including chairman of the board and JUF's General Campaign chairman.