

Telling the Story of an American Rescue

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Group seeks information on Jewish children brought to the U.S., saved from Nazis

by Aaron Leibel
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It all began last year when social science researcher Iris Posner of Silver Spring saw, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, the documentary about the 10,000 Jewish children from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia who were taken into foster homes in Britain from 1938 to 1940 and saved from the Nazi death machine. Weren't there any Jewish kids who were brought to America under similar circumstances, Posner wondered?

There were, she discovered after some research at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "To educate the public and scholarly community about those American children," Posner and fellow researcher Lenore Moskowitz have formed One Thousand Children (OTC), Inc., a nonprofit located in Silver Spring.

Posner, 56, a former researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health and the Social Security Administration, seems to be a good fit for the task. "Since I was a little girl," she says, "my pleasure has always been to go to the library to do research. I have always been aware of Jewish heritage," continues Posner. "I can write, research, make films [her resume includes a certificate in film production from New York University], interview. This has come to my door and I accept the challenge." "Most important, it is the right thing to do."

Moskowitz, also 56, has research qualifications as a trade analyst at the Federal Trade Commission. Using the documents of U.S. groups involved in the rescue effort, including the American Friends Service Committee, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, German Jewish Children's Aid and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, OTC has identified 1,054 unaccompanied children who were brought to the United States in the 1934-45 period and placed in foster homes. She believes there were about 125 more children who have yet to be found.

It was primarily a private-sector effort, says Posner, with those charitable organizations raising money and providing logistic support - especially escorts who accompanied the children on ships to their new homes. (Posner says records show that some dedicated people spent long periods of time accompanying small groups of children from Europe to America and then getting on another ship to return to Europe to escort another group.) Before 1941, the children arrived in small groups. There was hostility to letting foreigners enter the country during the Depression, and therefore the sponsors wanted to avoid drawing attention to their charges, Posner explains. The children came in on quotas of their countries of origin.

After that, hostility lessened as word spread of the treatment of Jews spread, and the children came in larger groups. In 1941 and 42, some 250 Jewish children in southern France were brought to the United States in larger groups after their parents were deported.

To find American foster families for all the children, appeals were made to synagogue congregations and Jewish organizations. OTC's mission is to interview the survivors about this rescue effort, without being intrusive and maintaining survivor confidentiality for those who want it.

To that end, Posner says, OTC is working with the USHMM, the Shoah Visual History Foundation and the Wiesenthal Center. Those organizations are asked to compare their databases with that of OTC and to contact people common to both databases, telling them that OTC wishes to talk to them. That system permits complete privacy for those not wishing to take part. OTC also will protect the privacy of those survivors who do take part, says Posner. "Only bona fide researchers will be given access to OTC data," she says. "They must be doing relevant research and sign an agreement not to disclose individual information. No identifying information on any individual will be made public without that person's agreement."

In addition to interviewing the survivors, encouraging research (Posner has found only one "comprehensive study" of those children, *Unfulfilled Promise* by Dr. Judith Baumel) and setting up its Web site (www.onethousandchildren.org), OTC has other ambitious plans, including:

- Producing a documentary. Posner says she has been in touch with a New York film company, which is interested in making the film. However, the issue is money. She needs to contact foundations that provide money to make documentaries. (Posner needs to raise money in general, but says she is "just

in the beginning of identifying funding sources." Since OTC's incorporation in December, she and Moskowitz have been personally funding the nonprofit.)

- Help OTC children find and communicate with each other.
- Organize a first reunion of OTC survivors. OTC is negotiating with organizations to finance a reunion, which Posner hopes will take place next year.
- Publish memoirs and related educational materials.
- Maintain an archive of OTC-related materials and organize traveling exhibitions. So far, OTC has been in contact with 50 survivors. Posner hopes to have communicated with the estimated 500 remaining survivors during the next six months.

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(Note: This article may be reprinted with credit to the author Mr. Aaron Liebel and the Washington Jewish Week.