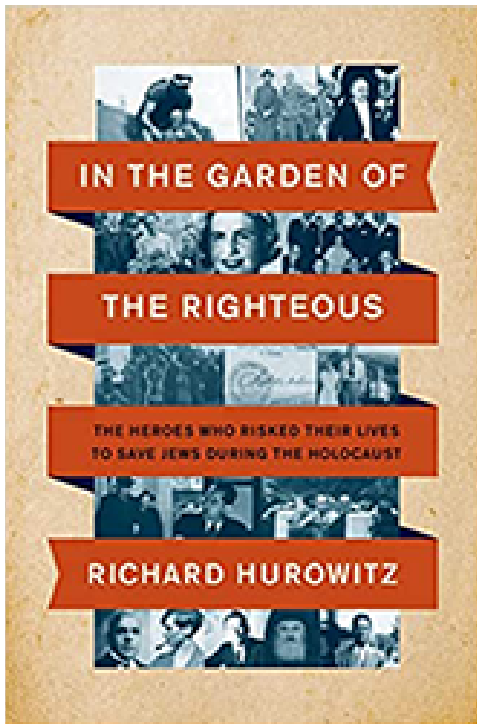


ABOUT

In The Garden of The Righteous: The Heroes Who Risked Their Lives To Save Jews During The Holocaust

by Richard Hurowitz



By Linda Kantor-Swerdlow – February 20, 2023

On May 30, 1941, shortly after the Nazis began their occupation of Greece, two Athenian partisans climbed atop the Acropolis and tore down the swastika flying overhead. Meanwhile, resistance groups banded together to rescue Jews and other refugees. Most prominent among these humanitarians was Damaskinos Papandreou, the Archbishop of Athens and the head of the entire Greek Orthodox Church. Damaskinos was the only head of a European church to condemn the final solution formally. He even issued false baptismal papers and ordered priests and nuns to hide Jews in churches and convents. Ultimately, the efforts of all three — the church, resistance groups, and private citizens — saved two-thirds of Athens's Jews.

Damaskinos is honored in the Garden of the Righteous at Israel's Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem. The garden pays tribute to individuals who risked their lives, liberty, and/or careers in order to save Jews during the Holocaust. The 27,000 individuals honored constitute half a hundredth of one percent of the European population, or one in 20,000.

Named after the memorial garden, Richard Hurowitz's book presents in-depth case studies of individuals from various nations who took significant risks to do what they believed was right. Such individuals include Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat; Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat-cum-spy who defied government orders and issued Jews visas, saving thousands of their lives; Georg Duckwitz, a German diplomat in occupied Denmark who alerted the Danes to the intended date of the Jewish deportation and helped arrange their safe passage to Sweden; Irena Sender, a Polish social worker and nurse who worked with the Polish underground and rescued over two thousand children from the Warsaw Ghetto; and Gino Bartoli, a champion Tour de France cyclist who transported false documents across northern Italy during his training. The case studies are moving and engaging, each incorporating the individual's backstory and the historical context specific to their region.

Despite the many difficulties and dangers that the rescuers faced, most tended to minimize their deeds and describe them as nothing special — just a matter of doing the right thing. Studies have found no correlation between this attitude and the rescuers' gender, age, nationality, race, family size, or birth order. However, it appears that parenting style was a common thread. Most of them grew up in loving, consistent, and non-authoritarian households, with guardians who behaved altruistically and were accepting of people from different backgrounds. In turn, the rescuers tended to have a strong moral code based on their religion, ethics, ideology, and/or sense of compassion.

In the Garden of the Righteous is a timely book, given that we live in a world where antisemitism, racism, and homophobia are again on the rise. Hurowitz's vivid, finely crafted portraits remind us to fight these injustices with everything we've got.