

-TITLE- YVONNE JOSPA  
-I\_DATE- APRIL 26, 1990  
-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY- FAIR  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY- GOOD  
-DURATION-  
-LANGUAGES- ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-

Yvonne Jospa was born in Romania and went to Belgium to study. There she met her husband, whose family, like hers, were Romania Jews. Before the outbreak of World War II Mme. Jospa and her husband joined the Communist Party. Through the organization she worked with refugees, especially those en route to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Soon after the Nazi takeover of Belgium, her husband, a member of the National Front for Resistance of Belgium, worked to set up a Jewish Defense Committee under the Front. Mme. Jospa became the head of the branch of this that worked to rescue Jewish children. She organized the program that saved over 3,000 Jewish children by placing them in non-Jewish Belgian families. After the war she continued working with refugees. Even today she continues to work to fight racism by speaking to young children in schools about its dangers.

#### COUNTER

:90 She was born on February 10, 1910 in Bessarabia, Romania. She was the third of four girls in her family. She came to Lier in Belgium to study when she was 18.

1:40 Bessarabia changed countries with each war. Before the Russian revolution it was part of Russia, and after the war it became a part of Romania. Her family was not a strictly practicing Jewish family, but they were traditionalists.

1:70 Her older sister was a populist--an educated person who went into the people to teach them to read and write. Her family was used to living and dealing with people of all different religions and nationalities.

2:00 The roots of her life were in this education to deal and interact with all people in any situation. Her family taught her this.

2:30 Her husband grew up in the same small town in Bessarabia. Three out of the four children in his family came to study in Belgium, he in the same town as she.

3:00 Growing up in Bessarabia was very hard. The orthodox religion was very hard -- it was from the middle ages. Her family had good relations with the priest from the orthodox church and his family.

However, outside neither he nor his family would talk -to

them because they were Jewish. No one could talk to Jews. Everyone knew that these two families were friends, yet they still could not speak. When she came to Belgium she did not always have the feeling that she was Jewish like she did in Bessarabia. She couldn't get away from it there.

3:60 It was easier for her to have good relations in Belgium because she came to study and not to work. Therefore, she wasn't bothering anyone or trying to take anyone else's job.

3:85 The Jews at the university formed a group. They were more interested in what was happening politically in Bessarabia and their other home countries than in Belgium really. There were more than 20 of them from different countries.

4:25 In Belgium they felt secure. Their preoccupation was towards Bessarabia where it was not good. There were pogroms. Her sisters came to Belgium later and her parents stayed in Bessarabia.

4:50 During the Russian occupation her father had a big tobacco plantation and a lot of forests. When it became Romania, this was all taken by the state.

4:75 Her father was one of three judges for the town. Her mother was part of the committee for the Jewish school. Both always believed in the community and social works.

5:40 Her husband's parents were Jewish nationalists, and were very cultivated people interested in music, literature, and all arts.

5:72 She was married in 1933. She had a degree as a social assistant, and worked at the sociological institute until the war.

6:22 Her husband worked in pharmaceutical.

6:40 They were always concerned with Jewish problems, but in general and not really in the community - more against injustice in the world. When they were married they joined the communist party in Belgium. Before this they were part of a circle trying to get refugees asylum in Belgium.

7:00 The people who got political asylum in Belgium had the same rights as others except they were not allowed to be politically active. They would be active, get expelled from that country, and go to another, etc.

7:35 At that time her mission was to accept Rumanians who wanted to fight in the Spanish Civil War. They stayed at her home and she routed them to the French border.

7:75 When she was a social assistant she was busy on the weekend working with a home for Spanish children.

7:95 She was busy on a national scale. Wherever help was needed, she went.

3:80 For her the people were more important than the religion. Today, she is no longer a member of the communist party, but her ideas remain the same.

4:10 The United Nations took over the job of dealing with refugees and displaced persons after the war. There was a commission for released prisoners. If these people were Belgian and had ties in Belgium it was easy, but if they were foreign a special commission came to see what they could do for them. The people were brought there like animals. She organized trips to museums and places like that to give them back their lives. She says it was a good job.

4:80 Most people thought that the end of the war meant the end of racism. She disagreed, saying there was still racism to fight.

5:00 A lot of people were ashamed to say they were anti-semites after the war because they saw what had happened in the camps, but her husband and other friends knew that anti-semitism was not dead. They created a small committee to fight anti-semitism. They fought the battle against racism, anti-semitism, and xenophobia.

5:45 No one in her family survived the war. They were burned in a camp in Romania. They never came back. She has a sister in the U.S., but she was in Belgium, not Romania during the war. Her older sister was also very social-minded like she is, but her younger one less so. She was also very influenced by her husband and his actions. He was very human.

6:00 "It is important to teach children to live together with other people even if they wear different clothes, or eat different food, or speak different languages--to love each other."

6:25 There is a book which tells the story of a bird who has different feathers. It shows how the other birds receive this bird. The videotape of this is shown in schools when they talk about racism, and how to fight their feelings. It is very hard for small children to understand this. They go into schools and talk about this, using the bird as an example.

6:68 A child once said that he did not like Americans. When asked why, he had no reason. He finally said, "because they walk too slow." He had no real reason because he had only heard it from his parents, and then imitated them.

8:10 They were Belgian citizens since 1934 so they were not really bothered by the Belgian police.

8:25 They also took care of German refugees from Nazism. They sent them to fight fascism in Spain. Sometimes her house was like a hotel, full of people coming from different countries en route to others. She knew Belgium very well, including the borders, so she could smuggle people in and out without the police's knowledge.

8:60 She also took care of Jewish German and Austrian refugees. She tried to get them homes to stay in and places to work. This was in 1935 and 1936 and it increased in 1938 with Kristallnacht. The Belgian government let some in legally. She worked to get more in illegally, but get them honest work so they would not be thrown out.

9:02 Minister of Justice Dubus de Warnasse said in 1936 or 1938, that there were already 90,000 Jews in Belgium and he could not allow any more in because they would occupy all of Belgium. He was very anti-Semitic.

9:35 The Minister of Foreign Affairs said that because they were neutral they could not allow more in officially. Without illegal activity, a lot of Jews would have died.

9:55 Once you got the people past the borders, the city halls would register them easily, and did not give them a problem.

9:75 Her parents were happy about the Russian revolution in 1917.

When the Russian revolutionaries came into Bessarabia, they first burnt the houses of the nobility. They lived near the Baron's house, which was burned, and the revolutionaries wanted to burn their house too, but the peasants said not to. The people saved them.

10:15 There were both Jews and non-Jews among her communist group in Belgium.

10:40 Even in 1933 he husband realized that the Germans would act badly against the Jews. Hitler wrote everything he would do in Mein Kampf, but many did not believe that he would follow it when he took power.

In Belgium the rightist extremists began to rise, and they had to fight against them too. They wanted to throw out the Jews then in Belgium. Even the communist party leader in Belgium did not believe the Nazis would want to exterminate all the Jews then.

10:95 A lot of Belgian Jews thought that because they were Belgian citizens they would not be harmed by the Germans. The Nazis started making racist laws against foreign Jews. They could have been rescued had they acted sooner. When they were done with the foreign Jews, they started with the Belgian Jews.

11:10 The translator, also a Jew, tells of his father being warned by a German liberated from Dachau about the ultimate fate of Jews under the Nazis. When his father told others in the Antwerp Ghetto he was not believed. His father believed the man and took his family to Brussels where they lived among the Belgians in order to be safe.

11:55 Officially Jews were not allowed into Belgium because it was a neutral country, but they were quite safe once over the border. Hitler started making differences between Jewish and other immigrants. He began "cleansing the Belgian population."

11:70 When the Germans invaded Belgium, the Belgian government put all of the German immigrants, mostly Jews, into camps in Curss (ph) and elsewhere in the free-zone in the South of France because they thought they were spies. After the war, they came back home. There in the South of France they were safer.

12:30 From the start of the occupation a National Front of Resistance was created in Belgium. They accepted all political opinions as long as they were against the Nazis. They were also against the Rechtsists, the extreme rightists in Belgium. Everybody who wanted to fight the Nazis came into the front. Her husband was one of the founders of the movement. In the beginning it fought for all the population.

12:75 The Germans knew that the population of Belgium would react very strongly to anti-Jewish laws so they started off slowly. They wanted to get the population on their side against the Jews.

13:00 Her husband had an extraordinary political flair. He understood from the beginning that things would only get worse. He realized this when the Jews had to be registered in a special book--the Jewish population book. He immediately started to discuss this with the National Front Committee. When the Jewish population had to hand in their radios, he felt he had to do something.

13:20 When the Jews were told to wear the star of David in 1941, he

asked the National Front Committee to allow him to start a committee especially for the Jews because they were the population in the most danger. It took three months before they agreed to create a committee inside the Front. It was called the Jewish Defense Committee and its mission was to rescue the Jews.

13:80 No one was safe, but she had three reasons to be in danger-- she was Jewish, communist, and anti-Nazi. She and her husband remained registered at their old domicile, but moved illegally and registered somewhere else with false names and papers.

14:05 She stopped work at the time of the invasion.

14:20 When her husband was captured he was sent to Birkenau, and he was in the clandestine political committee there. People were amazed at how well he predicted what would happen. He was arrested because he was caught meeting with a courier who was identified as Jewish. He was deported as a political resistor, but not as a Jew.

14:80 The Jewish Defense Committee separated the parents from the children to make it easier to hide them. There was a special committee for adults and another for children. For the adults, the problems were finding places to stay, and giving them the possibility to pay for rent and food.

15:00 The Jewish committee asked that the Belgians act not only against the occupation, but also act to save people who need help. One could be sent to a concentration camp for hiding a Jew.

15:40 It is possible that some people acted for the money given them, since life was hard.

15:55 She was responsible for the children's committee inside the Jewish committee. Normally people did not refuse to help the children. Once she had a group of about five girls of 14 to 16 years. She asked to hide them in a convent. The mother superior got scared because the girls were so old, and asked three days later that they take them back.

15:85 They never had anyone arrested for hiding the children. This was made possible due to their organization. In order to save the children, they had to live as Belgians, not as Jews.

16:00 They kept records of all of the children at the ministry of health. They placed more than 3,000 Jewish children safely.

16:20 Sixteen people worked day and night to organize this. Nothing could be done by mail because it was censored. When the children were hidden there had to be a link between the children, the committee, and the parents. This way if one was caught they could not give away the other.

16:55 The most horrible thing about the war was the separation between children and parents. The people who took the children had to be people the parents did not know. The parents could not know the people's name or where they lived.

16:80 "Mothers hit their heads against the wall and said, 'do what you want, just let my children be with me.' They didn't know if they would ever see them again." It was more difficult with small children. Once the separation had occurred the small children had to learn new names to survive.

17:10 They introduced a parallel mail system allowing parents and children contact through letters. A second program for food cards and stamps was begun. Legal cards and stamps were stolen by

partisans and used for Jews.

17:40 In Charleroi there was a lot of resistance. That area alone gave 172 food cards to help. In the commission there were many non-Jews who helped Jews.

17:60 Once a month they brought the rent money for the children and would pass the mail between the parents and children. False baptism certificates were prepared by priests for the children. These were used to register the children in school.

18:00 The committee kept three books. In the first were the real names of the children they hid. In the second was the place the children were hidden and under what false name they were registered. The third book connected the two but was coded. Each book was kept in a different place for safety.

18:30 Once a month they used these books to coordinate bringing things to the children.

18:60 The children in hiding lived as Belgians, even going to school. Even the schools sometimes wondered if they were Jewish, but they never asked.

18:85 They really knew what she had accomplished only after the war. They did not think during the war, they just acted. There were moments when they were very scared, but these times did not last.

19:00 The commission lost three members to the Germans, but none for the rescue program, all for different work. One of these was her husband. He returned but was very affected, and very ill. They hid him in a secret place for three months.

:15 She lived near the Avenue Louise, where the Gestapo was located. She dreamed of being able to walk down that Avenue without fear.

:35 She does not believe that the Belgian population helped the Jews for money or personal convenience. It is possible that some did, but most acted due to their feelings.

:65 The Gestapo organized a camp to bring city children to the country for 2 months. They made the parents bring the children to the train station to see if they were Jewish. The parents went very early to the station and left immediately so they would not be seen.

1:25 She had to take the tram to the station. She got on the first one in the morning and without looking at the driver she told him that she must get to the station as quickly as possible. He did not look at her, nor ask any questions, but passed by other stops and took her directly to the station, sensing it was important.

1:85 Even the Christian hierarchy was broken. Many acted independently to hide children and did not ask superiors. 2:25 The most important Catholic official in Belgium was a collaborator. Due to this many priests acted alone.

2:50 The Belgian population is very nice because not only the new parents had to approve when taking a child, but the other children in that family, and other families also could have objections to it. This did not happen.

2:90 After the war there were problems because the rescuing families had grown so attached to the Jewish children and didn't want them to leave. Also there was a problem in the Jewish community about those children whose parents did not come back. The

Jewish community wanted to send these children to Israel. She did not agree. She thought that since they were Belgian, they should stay in Belgium at least until they were old enough to decide for themselves. This was the most disagreeable time for her because she had to not only fight for the children, but to fight the Jewish community. She won in part.  
.END.