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Holocaust Survivors to Honor Spaniards Who Helped Them; [Valley Edition]

KARIMA A. HAYNES. Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, Calif.: May 19, 2000. pg. 1

Abstract (Summary)

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The officers later found [Peter] Blau in the woods. They sent him to a home for orphaned and wayward boys run by Roman Catholic nuns, where he lived for five months until his mother's release from a women's prison where she had been held for entering the country illegally. Spanish officials allowed her to go free because returning her to her native Austria would have meant certain death in a concentration camp.

"The Spanish people were wonderful," said Blau, 62, of Woodland Hills, who owns a commercial and real estate lending institution. "We lived openly, as free people in Madrid. We honor them for what they did. They didn't turn us back but accepted us. I feel a great indebtedness to them."

Full Text (702 words)

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On a cold and windy October night in 1942, Peter Blau began his long walk toward freedom.

The 5-year-old Jewish refugee clutched his mother's and uncle's hands as they followed paid guides across the Pyrenees mountains between France and Spain, sleeping in the open forest by day and walking at night.

Somewhere along the way, the boy wandered off in the woods and couldn't find his way back to the group. His mother, Hilda Blau Preuss, turned herself in to Spanish border patrol officers in exchange for a promise that they would find her son.

The officers later found Blau in the woods. They sent him to a home for orphaned and wayward boys run by Roman Catholic nuns, where he lived for five months until his mother's release from a women's prison where she had been held for entering the country illegally. Spanish officials allowed her to go free because returning her to her native Austria would have meant certain death in a concentration camp.

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Like Blau, an estimated 100,000 Jews found sanctuary in Spain during Adolf Hitler's reign of terror in Europe during World War II.

After the war, Blau and his mother settled in Portland, Ore., and were eventually reunited with his father, who had escaped two concentration camps.

Blau's parents are now deceased. His uncle joined the British Army and fought for the Allies in North Africa.

Tonight, Blau and other Holocaust survivors will gather at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino for a special dinner and worship service to recognize the Spaniards who aided Jews in their flight to freedom.

Congregants will also honor Spanish Consul-General Herminio Morales and members of the Varian Fry Emergency Rescue Committee, an underground organization that helped intellectuals, artists and others escape Nazi Germany and provided them safe passage to Spain.

In 1492, during the Spanish Inquisition, Spanish Jews were expelled or forced to convert to Catholicism. At the height of the Holocaust, however, some Spanish citizens helped channel Jews to safety.

Tonight's event, "Celebrating Spanish Hakarat Ha-Tov: The Recognition of Goodness," attempts to acknowledge those Gentiles who refused to turn away from the systematic slaughter of 6 million European Jews, said Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, who heads the congregation.

Holocaust survivor Henry Slucki, 65, of West Los Angeles, said he too feels an indebtedness to the Spaniards who helped his family escape persecution in France, cross the Pyrenees and settle in Spain.

"Our family's slogan was to always stay one kilometer ahead of the Germans," said Slucki, who is a behavior analyst in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at USC's Keck School of Medicine.

Slucki said he remembers how as an 8-year-old he boarded a train and then a bus with his parents, Solomon and Rachel Slucki, for the ride to the Pyrenees.

(His parents, both now in their 90s, live in Santa Monica.)

"We were on a battered bus, and about a half-hour later the driver told us to get off," Slucki recalled. "The bus pulled off and left us on a dark, deserted road. Within minutes, three guides showed up. We went off the road into the bush and onto paths that they knew."

For three days, the group rested during the day and hiked at night, he said. "By the third day, I think we must have been in Spain."

Like so many other war refugees, Slucki and Blau eventually moved to the United States where they settled into communities, established careers and raised families.

"As I've gotten older, I've developed an appreciation for my past," Blau said. "I feel that life is a precious gift that I should never take for granted."

[Reference]

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[Illustration]

Caption: PHOTO: Henry Slucki and Peter Blau, who were brought to safety by Spanish citizens during World War II, will take part in tonight's ceremony at Valley Beth Shalom.; PHOTOGRAPHER: BORIS YARO / Los Angeles Times

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