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Should Young People Be Exposed to the Horrors of `Schindler's List'? Holocaust: Children must know about their elders' double witness-the capacity of humans to hurt and to heal and save.; [Home Edition]

HAROLD M. SCHULWEIS. Los Angeles Times (pre-1997 Fulltext). Los Angeles, Calif.: Jan 7, 1994. pg. 7

Abstract (Summary)

Our children must know it all. They must know the murderers but they must know the rescuers as well. They must know the story of Anne Frank but they must know as well the names and history of those Christians who kept her family alive in the attic for 2 1/2 years fully aware of what would happen if they were caught by informers or the Nazis. Do our children know of the rescuers of Anne Frank? What happened to Victor Kugler, Jann Kleimman, Meep Gies, Elizabeth Van Voskuil after their arrest and imprisonment in the Amersfoort concentration camp?

Do our schools, churches and synagogues teach the moral heroism of Christian rescuers of Jews, some of whom live in our own community? Have our young people met Irene Opdyke in Orange County, the Polish Catholic woman who hid dozens of Jews and saved their lives under the very nose of the Gestapo? Or John Weidner in Monterey Park, the Seventh-Day Adventist responsible for organizing a network of co-conspirators known as the Dutch Paris Express, which brought more than 800 Jews through the mountain trails to safety in Switzerland and to Spain? They are alive, articulate and in our midst. But there are tens of thousands more who live out their lives in dire circumstances. The Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers / Anti-Defamation League provides modest monthly grants to more than 1,200 aged and needy rescuers in 20 countries.

Full Text (774 words)

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Should we take our youngsters to see "Schindler's List"? Should we expose them to the excremental assault on the dignity of men, women and children during the horror years of the Holocaust? Or will we perhaps inadvertently lay a heavy stone of despair upon their young hearts? (The film is R-rated largely for its graphic portrayals of violence and terror that many adults find too painful to watch, but in context, the film is not unsuitable for older children.)

It is important that our Jewish and non-Jewish children know what happened. Cicero was correct: "Not to know what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child." It is perilous to raise children in ignorance of the past.

The question is not whether to know or to remember but what to remember and how to serve the honor of that memory so that it strengthens our morale and morality. Oskar Schindler, the Roman Catholic rescuer, represents that small but precious number of human beings who risked their fortunes, lives and the lives of their families to rescue people not of their faith. In every country that the Nazi predators invaded, there were ordinary men and women and families that refused to succumb to the ugly rationalization that there is no alternative to passive complicity with totalitarian killers of the dream.

In every country there were men, women and children, some of whom live among us, who refused to be caught in the deadly vise of "them" and "us" and who hid people not of their catechism in closets, attics, cellars, pig sties, holes in the ground. Ordinary people in every Nazi occupied country forged passports, falsified baptismal certificates, arranged underground escape routes knowing full well the consequences that would follow their being discovered.

Our children must know it all. They must know the murderers but they must know the rescuers as well. They must know the story of Anne Frank but they must know as well the names and history of those Christians who kept her family alive in the attic for 2 1/2 years fully aware of what would happen if they were caught by informers or the Nazis. Do our children know of the rescuers of Anne Frank? What happened to Victor Kugler, Jann Kleimman, Meep Gies, Elizabeth Van Voskuil after their arrest and imprisonment in the Amersfoort concentration camp?

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Goodness must not be forgotten. The rescuers must not be forgotten. It is important for our own therapy after the traumatized conscience of the Holocaust. In an era of growing polarization, xenophobic nativism, violence and selfishness, it is important that our children know real moral heroes of flesh and bone, human beings who demonstrated with their lives that the neighbor whom we are to love is not exclusively the one who prays or believes our way—that the neighbor is one created in God's image.

Children of the post-Holocaust need to have evidence of the sparks of divinity that are lodged in the dark husks of violence. They need moral heroes to respect the sanctity within themselves.

And we, their mentors, need moral heroes as mirrors held up to our own selves. Whom would we hide? Would we open the door to a pregnant woman pursued by vicious enemies? Would we hide the sobbing children? Would we offer them food and clothing? Would we handle their refuse, search out a doctor, bury their bodies undetected by the enemy? Would we turn ourselves into hiding places from the wind and shelters from the tempests?

Take them to the movie. Sit with them and explain the double witness to which our generation can testify: the capacity of human beings to hurt and the capacity of human beings to heal and to save.

[Illustration]

PHOTO: Oskar Schindler with his photo collection in 1963. // Bettmann-UPI

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