

NCJW Volunteers Attend 40th Reunion Of Holocaust Refugees In New York City

NEW YORK, N.Y. — History was relived through a blur of tears when a group of 200 World War II refugees reunited in New York City recently at the Public Theater. Many had not seen each other since the end of the war, and the excitement at the theater was electric, as the lobby filled with old friends embracing and the sounds of joyous exclamations in several different languages. They had arrived forty years before on August 3, 1944 as part of a group of 1000 refugees — 872 of whom were Jews — as special "guests" of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Government immigration quotas had been relaxed and a haven established for them at Fort Ontario, a former army camp on Lake Ontario in Oswego, New York.

The reunion was organized by journalist Ruth Gruber, author of Haven, an account of the Oswego Camp and her mission as the representative sent by the United States government to escort the refugees back from war-torn Italy and then to help them resettle in Oswego.

The poignancy of their shared memories was vivid for the group which had survived one of the blackest and most infamous periods of history. They had arrived in New York with few or no belongings, and lived through the remaining war-time years behind fences in the restrictive confines of the Oswego Camp, uncertain as to whether they would ultimately be granted American citizenship or deported back to Europe.

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) was one of the organizations who became actively involved in facilitating the adjustment of people

whose needs were as basic as having to learn the complexities of a new culture, its language, completing education and pursuing careers. NCJW's response was immediate and members rushed to meet urgent individual needs, sending up cribs and other infant furniture for the twelve babies in Camp, and collecting money, toys and books for the community.

NCJW was one of three national agencies who formed the "Coordinating Committee of Fort Ontario." "Collectively, these agencies assumed the responsibility of fulfilling the refugees' educational, recreational, rehabilitative and religious needs. NCJW was one of two organizations which underwrote all costs for education, which enabled the camp to hire professional teachers and to buy books and supplies.

Education was particularly important for the young children who had never been to school, for those whose schooling had been interrupted by the upheaval of war, and for the teenagers and adults who needed additional education to continue with career plans or to pursue a new vocation.

Ruth Gruber, who was referred to by several of the participants as their "guardian angel," noted NCJW's contributions during the commemorative program and in her book.

NCJW members who attended the reunion included Lenore Feldman, National Vice President and Nancy Rubinger, President, New York Section. Winifred Saltzman of Passaic, N.J. served as the organization's national representative in the historic reunion.

Ms. Saltzman, who was past president of NCJW Passaic/Clifton Section, and a former National Board member, had been very active in refugee settlement work. She became a national leader in refugee work when she was named national chairman of Service to Foreign Born, an NCJW program, and served on the NCJW committee which assisted the Oswego refugees. Later she represented NCJW at meetings of the Jewish Social Service Agency (which had been founded by NCJW's Passaic Section), which helped establish resettlement policy for refugees rescued from the Displaced Persons Camps after the war.

Commented Winifred Saltzman about the reunion: "Best of all, it was a testament to man's

humanity to man amidst the horrors of the Holocaust. One August 3, 1984, it was a reminder that only eternal vigilance can insure it will never happen again."

The Oswego refugees told individual stories which were all poignant tales of courage and heroism, unimaginable endurance and the will to survive. There were vivid accounts of people who climbed the Alps on foot to cross over to Italy, the rabbi who hiked with a baby in one arm and a Torah in the other, a woman who gave birth one day and continued to climb the next. There had been families hidden in churches by Italians who risked their own lives in the process.

There was the Yugoslavian woman who was caught ten times in camps and ran away each time, the woman whose husband died in Auschwitz and who fled on foot, crossing the Alps with her two young children, the Czechoslovakian woman who had been hidden in a tunnel and who later gave birth to her son in a jeep, enroute to the troopship, and the survivor who said simply, "You cannot imagine from books what we saw." There were the boys who were rescued and who later became Bar Mitzvah at Oswego, who in the words of one eloquent survivor, "Came of age in an age of no reason." The survivors numbered 1000 in all, out of 13 million Holocaust victims.

NCJW has a history of service to the foreign-born and to refugees which dates back to the earliest days of the organization, when it was founded in 1893. Concern with the plight of young immigrant girls prompted NCJW to form the Port and Dock Department in 1903 to help women arriving alone in the United States. In 1904 NCJW established a permanent Immigrant Aid Station on Ellis Island; in 1938 NCJW helped form German-Jewish Children's Aid; and in 1979 the organization received grants to develop training models for volunteers in Soviet resettlement projects.

Established in 1893, the National Council of Jewish Women is the oldest Jewish women's volunteer organization in America. NCJW's more than 100,000 members in 200 Sections nationwide are active in the organization's priority areas of women's issues, Jewish life, aging, children and youth, and Israel.

SAN FRANCISCO (WNS) — The National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency, has renewed a grant of more than \$70,000 to Hadassah to organize and record its historic archives, it was reported at Hadassah's annual convention here.

TEL AVIV (WNS) — An advertisement in the Jerusalem Post announced: "At long last...Cabbage Patch Kids make aliya..." It noted that at long last "the original world-famous Cabbage Patch kids have finally arrived in Israel." Many children in Israel have heard about the dolls but only a very few lucky ones have received them along with adoption papers as presents from the United States and have been showing them off to friends who have not been as lucky.



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