

Memories of Shelter and Abuse: The Reflections of Female Survivors on Gentile Rescuers and Sexual Violence in Hiding during the Holocaust in Poland

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After the liquidation of the ghettos in 1942, thousands of Polish Jews fled to the 'Aryan' side and attempted to secure shelter in the homes of former gentile neighbors, friends, and strangers. In hiding, Jewish women and girls were incredibly vulnerable to sexual abuse perpetrated by gentile helpers, yet this narrative remains marginal in the extant literature. In their postwar testimonies, survivors of sexual violence discussed their former gentile rescuers in variant ways: while some survivors expressed that the life-saving role of their rescuer took precedent over any of their other actions. Others remained tormented by their experience in hiding, having been sexually assaulted by individuals who had also helped to protect them. Faced with such essentially incongruous behaviors, certain survivors chose to omit sexual violence from their personal narratives of the Holocaust. Tova, A woman from Łódź, published an autobiography and did not include the sexual abuse in her book. "I was afraid that my children would read it," she explained, "and I did not want them to know. The men who raped me were also the ones who helped keep me alive." (1) The term "rescuer" in the context of the Holocaust is not as morally consonant as its normative meaning implies, although these helpers can satisfy the criteria for Righteous among the Nations.

This paper studies the ways in which survivors reflect on the memory of their gentile rescuers, drawing upon the postwar testimonial files of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (the 301 files), published memoirs, and the interviews conducted by the University of Southern California's Visual History Archive. Significantly, this paper draws attention to the intersections of survivor memory, the lasting legacies of sexual violence, and the politicized discussions of gentile rescuers and the Righteous among the Nations in Poland today.

(1) Rachel Lev-Wiesel and Susan Weinger, *Hell Within Hell: Sexually Abused Child Holocaust Survivors, The Comorbidity of the Traumata* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2011), 69.