

# ABOUT OUR UPSTANDERS: IT CAN BE ANYONE! IT'S A CHOICE!

## Niels Ferdninandson and Johan Jorgensen

Niels and Johan were best friends for a very long time, and even though they risked everything by bringing people to the coast during the occupation of Gilleleje, Denmark during World War II, they never thought of themselves as heroes. They simply thought of themselves as ordinary men who helped others.

Niels' son, Jan, and Johan' s daughter, Lotte, got married when they grew up, and they still live in Gilleleje as they raise their own family.

Jan is the mayor of Gilleleje, and is very passionate about giving people a voice.

## Chaja Verveer

Chaja was born in 1941, and was separated from her family very early in life. In 1944, she was first sent to the Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands, but a kind woman was able to take care of her.

From Westerbork, Chaja was sent on a very long train ride to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. Again, she found kindness in strangers who looked after her.

She was finally sent to the Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. The camp was liberated in 1945.

She has lived and worked in Houston as a business consultant for more than thirty years. She has worked with the Child Survivors organization in Houston, and has also served on the board for Holocaust Museum Houston ([www.hmh.org](http://www.hmh.org)).

## Ruth Steinfeld and Lea Weems

Ruth and her sister, Lea, were small children in the transit camp of Gurs in southern France when their mother made a heart-wrenching choice: the girls were sent with members of the OSE, so that they could have a better chance to survive the war.

The girls lived with other children and the members of the OSE, who also became their teachers.

Ruth and Lea, until she passed recently, live in Houston. Ruth has worked with the Child Survivors organization in Houston, and is very involved with Holocaust Museum Houston ([www.hmh.com](http://www.hmh.com)).

Ruth often says that her mother gave her life twice: once when she gave birth, and once when she sent her with the OSE.

## The OSE (Œuvre de secours aux enfants)

The OSE was first begun in 1912 in Russia as the OZE. It was begun to help the needy of the Jewish population in the town of St. Petersburg.

It moved to Berlin in the 1920s, and when the threat of the Nazis came in the 1930s, it moved again to France. Once there, the members tried to save as many children as they could. During the 1940s, they organized underground networks to smuggle children out of the camps and to safer places.

Today, they still work to help people in need.

You can visit the OSE website (it is in French): <http://www.ose-france.org/>

## Hermann Wygoda

Hermann lived in Warsaw, Poland until the Nazis invaded the country in 1939. With Germany' s *blitzkrieg*, he was forced to begin his long journey to his safety.

He writes in his memoir, "There were no rules of safety to follow to save one' s life; all of our choices had to be quick..." Although Hermann did not have any guide book to help him to his safety, he took many risks and hid the fact that he was Jewish.

Even though he was separated from his family, he found the courage to journey onward, through Germany and the epicenter of the Nazi regime, and finally to Italy. It was in the small town of Savona, in northern Italy, that he found his destiny: to lead the partisans in the fight against the Nazis. Going by the name Enrico, he was able to help the partisans liberate Savona from the Nazis.

Because of his heroic actions, he was awarded the American Bronze Star in 1946. He is revered by the townspeople of Savona, and seen as a hero for his courage during the war.

Hermann wrote *In the Shadow of the Swastika* about his courageous journey. It has been translated into Italian and given to Italian school children so that they can learn about him.