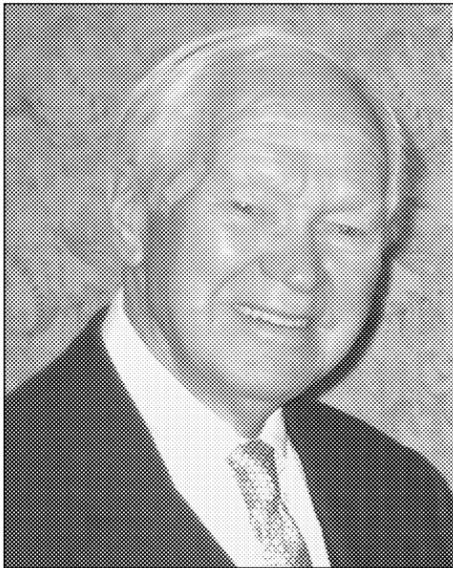



POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS
Rescuer urges Israel to honor "Poland's Heroines of the Holocaust" – Its Catholic Nuns

 By: *Paul Z. Wos*

Paul Z. Wos

New York, N.Y. Paul Z. Wos and his deceased parents saved the lives of twelve Jews during the German occupation of Poland in World War II. In 1998, Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial honored them as "Righteous Among the Nations."

With the Wos family receiving this designation a half-century after their rescue, Mr. Wos feels there are other Polish rescuers who deserve to be recognized the same way but have been overlooked to this day.

One such group he can think of is the nuns and other members of Catholic religious orders who took Jewish children inside their orphanages and convents and hid them from the Nazis until the Holocaust was over and it was safe for them to leave.

Since Poland was the only country in all German-occupied Europe where an official death penalty was ordered for anyone helping a Jew, the nuns knew they and the Jewish children would all be killed if the Germans discovered whom they were hiding. "We all knew we could be shot on the spot," said Wos, "but we were also Christians."

In a letter he mailed to the Yad Vashem Memorial, Wos wrote, "An estimated 2,000 Jewish children were saved this way. At least 1,000 of these religious women took part in this humanitarian project. Yet, only 20 or 30 of this 1,000 plus are officially honored by Israel. May I suggest a correction for this oversight?"

The oversight, according to Wos, results from Yad Vashem's present rules requiring a rescued Jew to speak up and certify that the Christian who helped in the rescue really did it.

Only a handful of Polish nuns were able to be formally acknowledged this way. The Wos family is now known as "Righteous" only because the Jews they saved were willing to testify for them and verify the rescue.

"To follow your usual procedure of proof and testimony from the rescued Jewish child is, of course, impossible," continued Wos in his letter.

In seeking a way to commemorate the charity and sacrifice of all the nuns, he suggested, "a special monument at Yad Vashem dedicated to the memory of these heroic women who risked their lives in protecting the lives of the Jewish children."

This is not the first time Wos is persuading Israel to give credit where credit is due. Several years ago, he asked Yad Vashem for a similar monument to the memory of the many other Christians

in Poland who were willing to ignore the death penalty and tried to save Jews anyway.

The Germans killed most of the Jews who could have testified on behalf of the Poles who helped them had they survived. Many Poles were killed along with the Jews they were attempting to save.

Wos was disappointed when Israel turned down his idea because history has obscured the fact rescuers in other German-occupied countries did not face an official death penalty like the Poles.

Without the monument Wos hoped for, the full story of the help the Poles gave Jews continues to be understated, he believes.

"Even when Polish heroism in saving Jews is admitted, it is often followed by, 'it wasn't enough' or 'you should have done more.'"

The fact is, "however, we did do more. A lot more," he told Yad Vashem.

Those who insist on criticizing the Polish people, "pay little attention to the fact Poles are honored as the largest group of rescuers at Yad Vashem and that Yad Vashem never recorded the efforts of thousands of other Poles the Germans killed as they attempted to help Jews," he added.

Wos was a member of the Armia Krajowa, Poland's anti-German and anti-Communist underground resistance. He is a consultant to the Holocaust Documentation Committee of the Polish American Congress and its Children of Polish Christian Holocaust Survivors.

He has been a resident of Sea Cliff, N.Y. for many years and now is in the process of relocating to Sarasota, Florida.

His letter to Yad Vashem is reprinted below:

November 10, 2009

Mr. Avner Shalev

 Chairman of the Directorate
Dept. of the Righteous – Yad Vashem

Dear Mr. Shalev:

I write to you as a Polish Catholic who, together with my deceased parents, received the Yad Vashem Medal of Honor for rescuing and saving the lives of twelve Jews at the time the Germans were in the process of liquidating the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943.

The medals were presented to us in 1998 in a ceremony at New York's Israeli Consulate. Had the Jews we rescued not lived to speak out on our behalf – even at that late date – our act of Christian concern for our fellow Poles would never have been recorded.

Now that I have become an American citizen, I have come to realize how important it is for someone Polish to have such help recorded.

I am concerned that Jewish Americans are coming to terms with German atrocities and often holding Polish Christians responsible for the crimes. And this despite the fact Polish Christians and Polish Jews were both being murdered by the Germans during their occupation of Poland.

These Jewish Americans pay little attention to the fact Poles are honored as the largest group of rescuers at Yad Vashem and that Yad Vashem never recorded the efforts of thousands of other Poles the Germans killed as they attempted to help Jews. The efforts of these courageous Poles will forever remain unrecorded because the Jews they tried to save were killed together with the Poles and are not alive to confirm to Yad Vashem the authenticity of the attempted rescue.

I have also observed that, even when Polish heroism in saving Jews is grudgingly admitted, it is trivialized and we are told, "it wasn't enough" or "you

should have done more." The fact is, however, we did do more. A lot more.

I am convinced most of these detractors are unaware of the complex process and documentation required by Yad Vashem for someone to be recognized as a "Righteous Among the Nations." Nor are they aware the Germans ordered that any Pole who gave any kind of help to a Jew should be killed, even sometimes with his entire family.

One group of Poles whose Christian and selfless dedication to helping Jews has been woefully overlooked is the Catholic nuns and sisters who hid Jewish children in their convents and orphanages and prevented them from falling into the hands of the Germans. An estimated 2,000 Jewish children were saved this way. At least 1,000 of these religious women took part in this humanitarian project. Yet, only 20 or 30 of this 1,000 plus are officially honored by Israel.

May I suggest you correct this glaring oversight as soon as possible? To follow your usual procedure of proof and testimony from the rescued Jewish child is, of course, impossible. A special monument dedicated to the memory of these heroic women who risked their own lives in protecting the lives of the Jewish children is not only appropriate but long overdue. I make this suggestion as a Pole who feels he understands how close the motivations of these nuns must have been to my own during that terrible period of terror and brutality.

As Catholics, recognition of their heroism would never be sought by the nuns. Their reward is of another kind. But whether we are Christian or Jewish, it is important for all of us to be reminded that – in the midst of the most terrible period of hatred and depravity imaginable – people of faith were put to the test and met it.

 Yours truly,
(Signed) Paul Zenon Wos

 Submitted by *Frank Milewski*
(718) 263-2700 - Ext. 105

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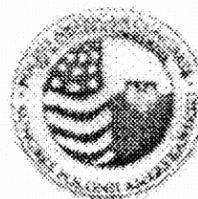
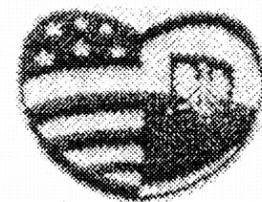
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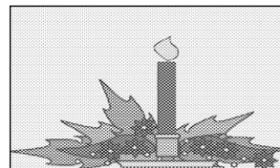
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Christopher Hiller - CEO

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