

A special event to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Rescue in Denmark, of the Danish Jews by the Danish People, was held at Mt. Rushmore National Amphitheatre, on Saturday, September 28th, 2013. The event was sponsored by the following organizations: Danish American Archive and Library; Mount Zion Temple; SD Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Thanks to Scandinavia; The Danish Immigrant Museum; and The Synagogue of the Hills.

Synagogue of the Hills President, Georgette Ohayon, wrote the following heartfelt letter after she attended the event:

THANKS TO DENMARK

In the face of horror, there was compassion.

In the face of hopelessness, there was hope.

In the face of tyranny, there was law and order.

In the face of evil, there was goodness.

The fisherman, the housewife, the children, the postman, the cyclist, the laborer, the pauper and the King all saved lives. When the call came, the Danish people put their families, their properties and their lives on the line to help save Jewish lives. "What else could we do?" echoes the young taxi driver in Copenhagen whose grandparents lived the nightmare of Hitler's war. He didn't say, "What else could they have done?" No, he said, "What else could we do?" His words echoed the same sentiments his grandmother would have expressed to her neighbor.

These questions, and more, reverberate against the walls of the Shrine of Democracy. What would I have done? What would my parents have done? It was miraculous that, of the approximate 7,000 Danish Jews, fewer than a hundred perished. Remarkably, only 400 or so were deported to the concentration camps. Even then, the Danish Red Cross kept many alive by providing both food and clothing during their internment. More importantly, they treated them with human kindness in the face of the daily horrors they were experiencing. It boggles the mind, even considering the small numbers compared to deportees from other countries.

The Danish people found ways to hide, to move, to feed, and to transport thousands of people. They hid the Jews in churches, in attics, in caves, in the hulls of small boats. They moved them by canoe, rafts and boats. Some Jews even swam to Sweden after being provided aid from their Danish countrymen. Overnight or over a short period of time, they moved crying babies, grandmothers who could barely walk and families who had to walk away from their homes and businesses.

Neighbor to neighbor, they took in families, shared their meager rations, provided their boats and gave generously of their time. Neighbor to neighbor, they maintained Jewish homes, by cutting their grass, making sure the pipes did not freeze in winter. Quite simply, they rolled up their sleeves and looked after one another. Dane to Dane they said no to deportation, no to taking away freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Neighbor to neighbor, Sweden was prepared to take in the refugees and settle and protect them until after the war, when they could go back to their lives. Neighbor to neighbor, Finland said no to the Gestapo, no to the concentration camps, no to Hitler.

There are many more stories of courage, of help and compassion throughout the many lands affected by the war's horror. Bulgaria, with a Jewish population numbering in the tens of thousands, and a tiny Greek Island with few Jews both said no to deportation of Jews who had been their neighbors for centuries. Human kindness did not stop at the doorstep of the church or the threshold of the synagogue; human dignity had no religious affiliation in that time of crisis.

One story (legend or truth, we can only speculate) that serves to illustrate the concerns the King of Denmark. He was said to have worn a Star of David armband during his morning horseback ride through Copenhagen, King Christian X (may he rest in peace) supposedly was heard to remark that there are no Jews in Denmark, only Danish citizens. Legend or truth, it merely points out the mood of his Danish people. They were proud, all of them, that their king was taking care of his people. He was indeed safeguarding the freedom of religion for everyone. If his Jews had lost that freedom, who was to be next?

Millions of Jews, Russians, Gypsies, Poles, homosexuals and countless others perished because no one stood firm in the face of the atrocities of Hitler's Germany.

Seventy years later, under the carved faces of Lincoln, Jefferson, Washington and Teddy Roosevelt, we came together. Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, Muslims and Jews all came to celebrate those who were saved and those who helped save them. Seventy years later we came together to celebrate those people who, neighbor to neighbor, helped people survive and thrive. Our Torah teaches us that when you save one life, you save the world. We raise our voices of thanks to those Danes, Swedes, Finns, Greeks, Bulgarians, and the many others who said no to tyranny, no to deportations, no to concentration camps, no to Hitler, no to death and yes to freedom of speech, yes to freedom of religion and yes to freedom to live. We all raise our voices and say:

L' CHAIM! TO LIFE!



Speaking: Stanford Adelstein, *South Dakota State Senator, District 32*

Pictured from left to right:

Anelise Sawkins, *Consulate of Denmark in Minneapolis, Minnesota*

Rudy Boschwitz, *Former United States Senator, Minnesota*

David Zellmer, *Bishop, South Dakota Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Photo submitted by Ruth Thomas