

## Chapter 4 Stories of Networks of Help During the Holocaust

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Résumé de l'article

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**LISTENING TO  
STORIES OF COURAGE  
AND  
MORAL CHOICE**

**CREATING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT INCLUSIVE CARE  
IN OUR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES**

*EDITED BY  
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**Chapter 4**  
**Stories of Networks of Help During the Holocaust**

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Stories of helping during the Holocaust offer opportunities to reflect on the choice to act in the face of great suffering and danger. Those who listened to these stories of helping had the chance to explore the circumstances, internal and external resources, and the relationships that made the choice to act possible. Stories of helping from different geographical and political contexts were shared by participants. Some of these contexts, such as Zakynthos in Greece, and all of Denmark, had leadership and a social and political history that helped to create conditions for interactive networks of helping. Some contexts, such as Central Greece, offered more isolated, individual opportunities to help. In some cases, narratives carried through resistance networks sustained and supported helping activities. Those who heard stories of courageous acts of helping carried a sense of pride and identification with the efforts to help. Individuals who heard stories of help and resistance after the war grappled with questions about how they might react in similar circumstances.

Keywords: choice to act, aural modeling, Holocaust, networks of resistance.

This study builds squarely on the shoulders of a number of earlier studies, most importantly on the work of Ervin Staub (2003), who advanced our thinking about the choice to do good by making a distinction between standing by in the face of suffering or making the choice to actively do something to alleviate that suffering. The focus of this inquiry is not the inherent justice of the act, nor whether there are elements of the act that might be construed as self-serving. The focus is the choice to act in the face of suffering.

We explore some of the circumstances, relationships, and actions that contribute to the desire and ability to act on behalf of others. Staub (2008) has convincingly shown that the modeling by significant others, as well as engaging in the act of helping, encourage continued helping. Our study asks whether aural modeling (examples of social action through the imaginal recreation of shared stories), through stories illustrating the choice of active helping, also encourages and/or sustains the choice to help in those who have heard the stories.

We are particularly interested in those elements that sustain helping networks, as helping networks that arise during times of catastrophe provide examples of the best of concerted human behavior. These networks are groups of ordinary human beings working together to exchange resources and assistance (Cook, 1982; Scott, 1991). During times of great danger, these networks appear as islands of decency amidst fear, violence, and cowardice.

We ask, specifically, whether hearing stories of helping can be a guide into action, effectively creating imaginary models for listeners. In this way, if a visual model is unavailable due to political or historical circumstances, stories may provide examples leading to the choice to actually help. Similarly, if a few examples of courageous behavior are available, but a climate of fear or despair is also present, aural modeling may augment the influence of visual models and/or the educative power of acts (however small) of courageous helping.

Kristen Monroe's (2002, 2004, 2011) excellent work studying rescuers during the Holocaust points to an altruistic identity (among other identities) integrated within each of the individuals who chose to help, despite great danger to themselves. Monroe (2004) states that "the value of caring for others was so deeply integrated into the rescuers' self-concept, it formed a self-image that was the underlying structure for their identities" (p. 236). She points out that while this altruistic identity was rooted in values which promote helping, the origin of these values seemed to be varied. Although their origins were certainly sometimes religious,

the value systems Monroe identified in these individuals also originated in beliefs that stem from a wide range of traditions, including humanist and socialist traditions. Monroe (2002) sees the decision to act on this helping identity as fundamental. While noting the variety of original motivating sources, she suggests further inquiry into the process of socialization that encourages the choice to help. This question about socializing factors encourages our current questions about stories. Can exposure to stories about people helping to alleviate the suffering of others encourage and sustain a helping identity?

George Vaillant's work (1977, 1993, 2002) identifies altruism as one of a handful of mature adaptive responses to stress and anxiety. His work generates questions similar to those inspired by Staub: what factors support and sustain the development of a mature adaptive response? More precisely, do stories about moral courage and altruism support a mature adaptive response?

We brought this question to our interviewees, who had heard firsthand stories of people who chose to help in the face of great stress and danger. Our interviewees included survivors of the Holocaust who both experienced active caring in the face of cruelty, violence, and danger, as well as those who heard firsthand stories from those who survived, those who helped, and those who both survived and helped others to survive. We asked these interviewees to relay the stories of their experiences as well as the stories they had heard. We chose to analyze the themes of these stories together, as the firsthand experience of survivors could only serve to enrich and perhaps, at times, to amend the stories heard from others who were not firsthand survivors of the Holocaust. We then analyzed the responses to these stories and experiences separately, so as to analyze the response of survivors separately from the responses of those hearing firsthand stories.

### **Different Geographical Contexts**

We examined the stories, experiences, and responses featured in this research in several distinct geographical contexts. The geographical distinctions were important because of the unique social, political, and historical context of each location. We looked at networks of helping responses during the genocide of the Holocaust. Throughout the horror of the Holocaust there were islands of light, locations in which there were both formal and informal networks of help established for persecuted Jews (Fogelman, 1994; Halter, 1998; Rittner & Myers, 1986). We looked

at the stories, experiences, and responses of three of these networks in Copenhagen, Denmark; Zakynthos, Greece; and in areas around Southern and Central Greece. Both Copenhagen and Zakynthos had extensive and comprehensive formal and informal networks of help. The networks of Southern and Central Greece involved formal support, notably from the Bishop and Mayor of Athens. However, the civil response was mixed, as some citizens cooperated with the Nazis. For that reason, this region serves as an example of helping in an environment that posed extreme and constant danger.

To name a few other examples, there was a large network of women throughout France who helped Jews to cross the border to Switzerland, a network of Jesuit Priests in Italy, a Jewish network and refuge in the forest near the Belarusian towns of Lide and Novogradek, and a network of priests in Belgium acting despite a formal policy of nonintervention imposed by the Vatican. This is in no way a comprehensive look at the networks of help during the Holocaust. Here, we are simply looking at several informal helping networks, the factors that sustained them, and the stories they generated.

### **Methodology and the Interviewees**

A collaborative action research model (Kvale, 1995, 1997) was used to analyze the data from the interviews discussed in chapters 1 through 4. In addition, we used a complementary qualitative research approach called the life story model as an approach to eliciting stories. The collaborative action model was used to analyze the thematic elements in the stories and interviews. (A more thorough description of our methodology is presented in Appendix A.)

Collaborative active research is a hermeneutical model that emphasizes the back-and-forth conversation between interviewer and interviewee, in which the asking of questions and the willingness to have one's perspective challenged build a shared understanding among both parties (Gadamer, 1989). In using this approach, researchers are expected to test their emerging understanding through continued dialogue with interviewees. When possible, I re-interviewed some of the interviewees from each region in order to obtain their feedback on my initial analysis and to refine my understanding.

For the section on stories of rescue in Denmark, I interviewed nine participants. Two of them were survivors of the Holocaust, and the rest had heard firsthand stories of the rescue. I was able to re-interview four of

the original interviewees. The section on Zakynthos was also developed out of nine interviews. Two of those interviewed were survivors of the Holocaust, and there were five re-interviews. There were six interviews relating to stories and experiences from South and Central Greece, and two were survivors of the Holocaust. I was able to re-interview four of the six participants. Prior to each section in this chapter there is a very brief description of the historical and cultural context.

### **Grounded Theory**

Theorists of qualitative research have emphasized the inductive nature of theory development (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The term “grounded theory” describes the process of theoretical distillation that occurs after sifting through data, and then refining the data into relevant thematic categories. Once this is done, theoretical formulations and/or theoretical questions emerge.

The distillation of the themes emerging from interviews of those who heard stories of active helping during the Holocaust is presented here as a way to offer perspective to the reader. These theoretical considerations will be examined at the conclusion of the book, in light of the observations regarding themes emerging from interviews relating to hearing stories of rescue in other contexts, as well as themes considered from the personal essays comprising the midsection of the book.

### **Theoretical Focus**

#### **Learning Through Stories of Active Helping**

Hearing firsthand stories of helping is auditory, and therefore an active learning process. The images of the story are co-created by the storyteller and the listener. The listener learns in a personal way, in a way that involves his or her own imagination. This active, personal involvement in the story readies one for further involvement through reflection and questioning. This involvement can be seen in the questions elicited from our interviewees who listened to stories of active caring during the Holocaust. Questions that arose for interviewees included: “What would I have done with a gun pointed at my head?” and “How do I stand up now for what is just?”

Stories can be (and often are) told again and again, and as listeners hear the story several times, they create an evolving set of mental images

by engaging in an active imaginative process. As one interviewee stated, “I heard the stories over and over, I didn’t just hear them once.” Although learning by doing may very well be the most powerful and immediate way to learn helping behavior (Staub, 2003), learning through engaging stories offers a unique opportunity for layered imagining and reflecting on the possibilities of active helping.

### **Stories and Helping Networks**

Stories appeared to play an important role in sustaining helping networks. Perhaps because inclusive helping offered opportunities to reflect on helping itself, stories appear to have been central to the sustenance and development of helping networks. This was especially evident for the networks in Zakynthos and Denmark. Stories, especially of respected leaders who were known for their helping roles (such as the mayor and Bishop of Zakynthos and the priests of Denmark), appear to have bolstered informal networking activities that ran counter to the official policy of the occupiers.

### **Stories of Active Helping, Identity, and Mature Defensive Responses**

Stories of inclusive helping appeared to have the potential to affirm an altruistic identity (Monroe, 2002, 2004, 2011), as illustrated by several interviewees’ responses to hearing stories of the rescue in Denmark. One interviewee, Sally,<sup>1</sup> said that “They made me want to seek out more . . . trying to do something good every day.” The stories also held the potential to provoke the questioning of long held values. For example, Mia told me in her interview, “I was brought up as a Greek, where it’s not my business, I was not part of the decision making. . . . But because of these stories I am more apt to stand up. You don’t have to be part of the masses.”

Monroe found that the experience of suffering may heighten awareness of the suffering of others and increase a defensive posture (2011). A critical question is whether aural as well as visual modeling may encourage the use of mature defenses such as altruism, humor, and sublimation (Vaillant, 1977, 1993, 2002). Vaillant’s (1993, 2002) longitudinal studies suggest that both action and visual modeling encourage the evolution of defenses. The current study suggests that aural modeling may also engender a more mature defense response for

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<sup>1</sup> Names of interviewees have been changed to protect confidentiality.

listeners, especially those who hear stories of active care again and again. In Mia's quote, above, we see denial transforming into altruism. Monroe (2004) has suggested that action may be the chisel for developing identity, and here it is suggested that stories of human responses to the suffering of others may refine and support that identity.

### **Zakynthos**

Zakynthos was originally occupied by Italian forces during the war, and several interviewees suggested that the Italian occupied forces and islanders lived in a wary peace. One interviewee, Sol, reported that at times, there was cooperation between the two groups:

The Italians would get their ammunition from tin boxes. My father would get the tin . . . and recycle it and make other things that were demanded . . . and exchange it for food. Money had no value. . . . There was an incident when my father went to the Italians. . . . He spoke to the Italians to get the boxes . . . and the Italians hid them for him.

Sol, an islander's son who studied in Germany, brought back descriptions of the death camps to the island: "He came back and he told everyone about the death camps, so even if the Allies said they didn't know about the death camps, we knew. . . . When he came back to the island on vacation he told people how the crematoriums functioned."

When the Germans came to occupy the islands, the leaders on Zakynthos (Bishop Dimitrios Chrysostomos and Mayor Loukas Karrer) refused to turn over the names of the Jewish citizens, and gave their own names to the German occupiers instead. In contrast, almost all of the Jewish citizens on the nearby island of Corfu were turned over to German authorities and transported to the death camps. Zakynthian Jews (a small population of about 275 during the Nazi Occupation) sought and found shelter in the homes of fellow islanders for the duration of the Occupation.

### **Stories of Occupation and Shelter**

Each of the subthemes described in this section emerged out of the recounted stories shared by interviewees. Below is a distillation of interviewees' accounts of the stories they heard relating to shelter and



rescue during the Holocaust. Survivors in Zakynthos described moving from house to house so that those hiding did not overstay their welcome:

The Germans came through, they brought a poster saying all Jews were to be confined to a ghetto. If they obeyed the poster they would go out between 5 and 8 pm and to leave a list of all the inhabitants on the door. At that point, a German officer asked for a list of all the Jews from the Bishop and the Mayor—and they gave them their own names. . . .

According to my father the Jews went to the villages because the bombs fell near the ghetto. . . . No one told the Jews to do anything. Whatever house we went to sheltered us. . . . We had to move from house to house so as not to leave traces. . . . Every time there was a bombardment, we would leave the houses . . . , in part not to outdo our welcome. (Tomas)

As they did in other parts of Greece, a number of Jewish citizens volunteered to serve in the Greek army. Mr. Martu, an interviewee, said that “They [some Jewish citizens] actually volunteered to the Greek army, up near the Albanian border. There was a colonel who was friends with my father.”

In 1943, forced labor was initiated, and since the Nazis received no names of the Jews on the island of Zakynthos, all able-bodied men were forced to work. Islanders saw the Jews as too vulnerable to work with the Nazis, so they took the place of their Jewish neighbors:

Dec 9, 1943. There was obligatory workmanship . . . lifting rocks. The Germans changed tactics. . . . Every man was going to work. . . . They were taking the rocks to hide weapons. . . . The islanders created a residence workout [and] the Jewish men were replaced by locals because the Jews were too vulnerable. (Tomas)

### **Everyone helped.**

Many families from the interior of the island were involved in the shelter and rescue operation. Jewish families often offered their sheltering families the skills they had or jewelry they had brought in exchange for the room and meals provided. No one’s name was handed over to the Nazi occupiers:

We went house to house for one year.... Families of 2, 3, or 4 were sheltered [and] no one left anyone behind. . . . Being Jewish, you always had a gold watch to buy food. . . . Whatever we had, we sold. Also, the Greeks were very hospitable—they had bread, wine, and oil—whenever someone was coming. It was an unwritten rule: whenever a guest came to the house, . . . if we had skills, we would offer [them] in exchange. (Tomas)

If someone [had] informed [the Nazi occupiers], he would have been hung. . . . If someone was informed upon, you would feel as if you were informed upon. You would not feel a little frustrated—you would feel enraged. (Demetrius)

### **Humanitarian feelings.**

Demetrius here reveals a broader sense of identification with others. Several of the interviewees referred to this sense of identification as “humanitarian feelings.” These humanitarian feelings were also associated, we found, with moral standards and “a good name”:

A good name, or honor, is more important than money. . . . It was morally correct to do what they did. . . . You identify the other person with you. You apply your moral standards to others, the same way that you apply them to yourself. (Demetrius)

I have heard the story [of deportation] from Corfu. . . . Well, the people here [in Zakynthos] are peace loving and accept everyone. . . . Although both islands [Zakynthos and Corfu] are music lovers, I believe there is a different conscience here. . . . There are different beliefs, different values. (Mr. I.)

In a film about the rescue efforts on Zakynthos, the mayor’s wife, Mrs. Karrer, was interviewed and asked about her husband’s decision to offer his name to the Nazi authorities. She replied: “They were afraid. They were terrified. It was what they had to do: they were our own people” (Lykouressis, 2001).

### **Support from the leadership.**

Interviewees believed that most people were aware of the story of the Mayor's and the Bishop's heroism in offering up their own names to Nazi officials. "When they heard that the Bishop behaved this way, the majority on the island agreed, and they were very proud" (Mr. I). Interviewees noted that those sheltering "were not alone. They had other supports, other officials who shared in their decision" (Si).

More than one interviewee noted the influence of the Bishop, specifically, who was educated in Germany:

I believe it was due to the Bishop. He knew German and he had a very persuasive personality.... He was heard differently by the Germans. (Marcos)

It is believed that Bishop C. had links to Hitler. They went to school together. It is believed that Bishop C., in a letter, asked Hitler to leave the supervision of the Jews to him. What is important is that by talking, by being diplomatic, they were able to delay the deportment of the Jews. (Si)

I have not found verification of personal communication between Bishop Chrysostomos and Hitler, but it was clear that there were a number of stories (based, in part, on the efficacious intervention of Bishop Chrysostomos) of his access to Nazi officials.

### **Perception of Jews by non-Jews on Zakynthos.**

The Jews had lived for hundreds of years on Zakynthos. Although it appears that there was a period of anti-Semitism in the 1800s, during which the Jews were ghettoized, there is also an important story associated with that period. A beloved poet and activist of that period, Foscolo, is said to have stated, "Jewish people are people themselves. I don't want them enclosed" (Marcos). Foscolo, along with other young people, tried to take down the walls of the ghetto, and their actions and words played an important part in the ending of that period of ghettoization.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jews were seen as valued members of the community. Marcos, an interviewee, said that "the presence of the Jews was very important. They helped with the prosperity of the island. They

were very decent and hardworking people.” Mr. I. reported that “they were very hardworking . . . and I’ve never seen a Jewish beggar.” The Jews were also valued because several were prominent musicians. One survivor I spoke with, Sol, led the island band before the Occupation. He described the lengths he went to in order to convey respect for the Christian traditions of the island:

I was head of the band. One of the Greek Orthodox holidays, it was raining. The holy cross had to be carried. I directed the band to put on their uniforms, that no one is directed to leave the band . . . so the ritual would not be destroyed. And they all became very wet . . . and they were angry, so I told them to go tell the Christians I did not let you go home. “Because of him we all got all wet.” There was mutual respect for each other’s religions.

## **Responses to the Stories of Rescue and Shelter**

### **The survivors.**

After the Occupation was over, the Jewish survivors mobilized immediately to express gratitude to their Christian neighbors by working to purchase new stained glass windows for the church of St. Dionysus:

There would be a new church for St. Dionysus—and the church needed a window. Immediately our parents said we will take this as our responsibility. Starting in the month of May, we would close the shops at 2:00. After we “closed” the shops, we continued to work and gave all that additional money for the windows of the church. Until August they worked to support the windows. August 24 would be the inauguration [and] we managed to finish before the opening. During that time, it was a good time. The monks would bring us coffee and food. We worked until 8:00 pm every night. (Sol)

In this way, the modern history of reciprocity between religious groups was continued.

More recently, survivors helped to sponsor *Song of Life* (Lykouressis, 2001), a film on the rescue of the Jews on Zakynthos. In the film, the history of Corfu, the nearby island from which over 1,800 Jews were deported, is contrasted with the history of Zakynthos. Mia, one of

the children of the survivors, described her uncle's involvement in the film: "My uncle was happy the movie was made. He organized many of the survivors, and this brought connections for me to other children of survivors. When I first saw the movie, I began to remember everything I saw as a child."

### **Responses of those who heard firsthand stories.**

One senses a quiet pride in the islanders who, while remaining outwardly humble, heard or witnessed the response on Zakynthos. Mr I. said in his interview that: "They could not believe it [when the Germans ordered the rounding up of Jews]. If I could have done it for my neighbors, I would have done it for them. We had accepted the existence of each other."

Demetrius shared his hope that he would react in the same way his forebears did, but he would never know unless he were confronted with a similar extreme test of courage. On the other hand, he stated that islanders simply regard the behavior in the story of Zakynthos as the way one behaves—as "ordinary":

It is very unique, and hard to understand if you were not born and raised here. I would be very offended . . . if someone said "give me a list." That clashes with my morality. It is *sui generis*, in a class of its own. It has to do with how you structure yourself: I don't see myself as different. That's why I do it. You see it as something ordinary.

Demetrius believes that these basic values persist on Zakynthos, although they are somewhat changed when filtered through the lens of the media. He describes these values as embodied and promoted by the older generation on the island: "It is not as if everyone are angels . . . it mostly has to do with older people. For instance, Mr. M's [a prominent lawyer] children's best friend is an Albanian. In Athens, there is more of a tendency to differentiate. It has to do with priorities—it does not come as a priority to distinguish myself."

Mia, who learned these stories from relatives who had survived the Occupation on Zakynthos, said: "It encourages me to look at people as humans, not this group or that group." She also stated that these stories have encouraged her to speak up when she disagrees with a decision that has been made by authority figures:

As an example, in my children's school, they fired a teacher because he refused to computerize science . . . and I was brought up as a Greek, where "It's not my business, I was not a part of the decision making." I was saddened by it, but because of these stories, I am more apt to stand up . . . . They [the stories of rescue] give you an awareness that you don't have to be a part of the masses. It is those who are willing to be different: they are the ones who make change.

### **South Central Greece**

Helping networks during the Holocaust in South Central Greece were neither as coherent nor comprehensive as those found in Zakynthos or Copenhagen. Although there were informally organized networks (especially involving those in the Resistance, the mayor and police force of Athens, and the Orthodox Church in Athens), there were also many instances of complicity with the Nazis, widespread expropriation of Jewish properties and businesses, and many who informed on those attempting to help the Jews. The stories of the deportation and extermination of thousands of Jews from Northern Greece (Mazower, 2006) had traveled to Athens and Central Greece.

Interviews in the region revealed, nonetheless, an important example of helping networks that, although not comprehensive, existed in very dangerous conditions. Those conditions were partially responsible for the fragility of rescue efforts there. It was typical for those who were sheltered to be constantly on the run, and subject to rape, torture, and the ever-present threat of deportation and certain death. Those who sheltered Jews in this environment were much more likely to be informed upon, beaten, interrogated, or killed.

### **The Stories (As Told by Interviewees)**

One survivor from Central Greece told stories of fleeing with a two-year-old while pregnant with another child. She shared the recollection that during this time, she was under constant threat of beatings and rape by the Nazi occupiers. She reported the need to move numerous times, as the homes of those sheltering Jews or aiding the Resistance were being burned to the ground. Another interviewee spoke

of the stories of her father who endured interrogations and beatings as he sheltered the assets of his employer, who had mentored him for years.

### **Famine.**

Interviewees talked about the disparate situation in Athens as compared to the outlying villages in the mountains. Antonio explained:

There was a big famine in Athens—over 300,000 died of starvation. . . . Currency completely lost its value. In that way, they were luckier in the villages [because] they could grow their own food. You did not let your neighbors see that you had food. . . . They would inform on you [as] a pretense to get the food from your house.

### **Constant movement and hiding.**

This climate of betrayal and danger in the cities led many to flee to the villages in the mountains. Those in the villages still had to keep moving because, at any point, the Nazi occupiers could come through looking for those in the Resistance, or those helping the Resistance, as well as any Jews still living there. The flight of Iona, pregnant and with a young child, illustrates the constant, desperate sense of danger:

Pretty soon there was a carriage with five Jews covered up inside. Everyone was in danger. They asked me, “Where are you going?” He said, “I’ll pick you up, but the two-year-old cannot cry.” They were headed to other places, but they left me at the village at the bottom of the mountains.

Iona eventually found a woman willing to take her in with her two-year-old, but she soon had to leave again:

This woman had a very tiny house.... She took us to her house [and] there were Resistance fighters and they [the Germans] began burning the houses that sheltered Resistance workers. . . .I had to leave so the old lady would not lose her house. . . . As I left, I started having labor pains.

### **Communication through Jewish Resistance fighters.**

Jewish members of the Partisan forces appeared to form a significant link to rescue in this region. Most importantly, they warned Jews in hiding in the mountain villages when the Nazis were coming through an area, as Abe recounted:

One time the Germans were coming through. . . . My uncle, who was in the Resistance, told us we had to hide. I went with my mother up one mountain. A villager took my sister on his back to hide in another area . . . and my father stayed with his mother. . . . She was eighty-years-old . . . and he said, "That's it, we cannot run, we will stay here." . . . We thought that was the last time we would see them.

### **Nothing was left.**

In contrast to the stories of Zakynthos, much of the property and assets of the Jews in South and Central Greece was expropriated by neighbors and Greek officials. Iona shared the recollection that "I went back to Larissa and nothing was left. . . . They stole everything . . . , so I started working as a seamstress."

There were exceptions to this mass expropriation, such as the family of Anita, whose father protected the assets of his mentor and employer's family for the duration of the war. She believes that her aunt (her father's sister) also sheltered members of that same Jewish family as they were passing through Athens on their way out of the country: "In those days, you did what your brother told you to do. You didn't question. So when he told her that these people had to stay . . . just for a few weeks, until they could get out, she didn't question it."

### **Responses to the Stories**

The survivors' responses from South and Central Greece echoed the theme of reciprocity found in the responses of interviewees on Zakynthos. In South and Central Greece, efforts at reciprocity were often carried out on an individual level. Iona said, "I went back to find the old woman [who sheltered us] and I helped her. . . . I sewed clothes for her." Responses of those who heard firsthand stories focused on trying to understand why those who rescued behaved as they did. This



consideration proved foundational to their thinking. Those who heard the stories emphasized that the reason that they gave the stories so much consideration was that they came from significant others, and they were told the stories over and over. As Anita said,

The stories were a foundation, especially because they came from my father. I tried to see why he did that—to understand. If it was another person that I didn't care about, I might have analyzed it, but I wouldn't look at it in the same way. . . . The other thing is that I heard the stories over and over, I didn't just hear them once.

Themes from the interviews of those who heard stories of rescues from this area (as well as from those who survived the Occupation) involved constant danger and constant movement, both for those in hiding, and to some extent, for those who helped with the rescue. Although there was some formal support for rescue efforts, particularly in Athens, much of the rescue efforts in the villages outside of the large cities came from the Partisan fighters, especially from Jewish Partisan fighters.

### **Denmark**

Denmark, similar to the other regions described in this chapter, is *sui generis*, in a class of its own. Denmark endured a period of cooperation with Germany when it was initially occupied. During that period, Danish society functioned as an independent “protectorate,” and Danish citizens helped to produce food and arms for Germany. However, as the war continued, acts of resistance grew and a well-coordinated Resistance effort carried out ever-increasing acts of sabotage toward the Occupation. In August of 1943, the Germans declared martial law. The Danish government refused their demands, and the Germans declared a state of emergency. From that point on in the war, Denmark was governed by a Danish administration under German command.

Up until that point, Danish Jews experienced relative freedom from persecution, but under German command, the deportation of Jews was scheduled for early October 1943, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Word was leaked early that fall about the impending deportations, and an immediate, improvised, sustained network to assist Jews in their escape to neutral Sweden began. The Resistance efforts in Denmark were initially carried out by citizens from every walk of life. Eventually, however, the

Resistance began to build coordinated networks to provide help to the Jews. Those included networks of doctors and nurses, networks of fishermen who would ferry Jews to Sweden, networks including churches and women's groups who raised money for the refugees, and networks of university students and professors (Buckser, 2003). With the help of those networks, over 2,400 Jews fled to safety in Sweden. Hundreds of Jews and their supporters were captured and sent to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt. While the Danish prisoners remained in the German camps, the Danish Red Cross delivered care packages to them that were assembled and sent by various helping networks, including a group of Danish priests. The Red Cross also pressured the Germans for the ability to visit those interned. Just one of those prisoners was sent on to a death camp. While rescued Jews, and some who helped in the Resistance, stayed in Sweden for over a year and a half, many of their homes, pets, gardens, and businesses were looked after by their Danish neighbors (Foighel, 2007).

### **The Stories: As Recounted by Interviewees**

#### **“This is what you do.”**

One theme that arose from interviews of those who heard firsthand stories of Danish rescue during the Occupation was that those who helped often referred to it as “nothing special” (Betty). As Sally put it, “To hear the fishermen, to hear them say it was no big deal—that acceptance on a local level—and it didn't seem to be ‘I am doing this great thing.’ ‘I am just going to help these people—to do what is right.’” Leo Goldberger, a psychologist and Danish Holocaust survivor who has written and presented extensively on the Danish rescue, has noted that this expressed humility is an important aspect of Danish culture (personal communication, 2009). He points to a humility which transcends religious teaching, reaching into aspects of everyday socialization. He also points to a history of rational self-examination, as well as respect for the principles of democracy (Goldberger, 1987). Religious, moral, and political beliefs will be discussed below, but first, another theme that warrants discussion emerged from the interviews: the theme of organizing with others.

**“They organized with others.”**

Alice was an interviewee who heard stories about the rescue from her parents, who were both centrally involved in the rescue networks of doctors and nurses. She remembered that “there was always a network around my parents.” Aside from mutual help from and for Resistance members and physicians and nurses, the hospital administration itself also contributed to rescue efforts. When Alice’s father had to go into hiding because Nazi officials were aware of his organizing efforts to help Jews and Resistance members, the hospital continued to pay Alice’s mother a salary. She spoke of both the organizing efforts of her parents and of some of the resulting consequences:

They were very good at organizing. They had an underground cellar [and they] also had a very big kitchen in the hospital . . . so they could feed people. They organized sails to Sweden. They also had to find money. . . . My father and his friend kept the money where the nurses lived [and] when the Germans came, they had to flush a lot of it down the toilet. I heard these stories when I was a child. They put Jews into the rooms where women gave birth . . . and they succeeded very quickly. . . . But my father had to go under cover.

Alice heard these stories recounted by her parents, who spent many years in the Resistance.

Claudio observed and overheard stories of his brother’s participation in the Resistance. He told a very moving story of his mother’s support for his brother after his brother joined the Resistance: “My brother made a commando raid . . . and he had a big wound. . . . He came back to Mom and Mom helped him bandage it up. . . . They said nothing to each other—she just helped bandage it up. . . . It was an expression of acceptance of what he was doing.”

Directly after news leaked of the planned deportation of Jews, there was an active, fluid connection between the Resistance and ordinary citizen rescuers. As another interviewee, Bent, recalled, “On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, there was a young boy who rode all around Copenhagen to find Jews who did not speak Danish, only Yiddish. . . . He was around 16 years old. . . . He was working with the Resistance. They found the addresses, so those people could alert them.”

Morton remembered stories of a woman who was part of a network of other women assisting the refugees who helped his father:

When I reflect back, my next thought pertains to the wonderful Danish lady [Fanny Arnskov, whom] my father met on the train in his hour of desperate need days before the German roundup in Copenhagen. . . . I later found out she was in the leadership of an active helping network of concerned Danish women which assisted political refugees.

**“Moral, political, or religious beliefs.”**

When Alice reflected on what might have supported her parents’ decision to help (as well as the decisions of so many others around them), she said, “I think one of the things that make people help was their moral, or political, or religious beliefs.”

Leo Goldberger (1987) points to a long Danish history of valuing democracy, as well as a cultural tendency toward self-reflection, both of which may have been significant in the coherence of the Danish response. The humanistic teachings of the Danish Protestant theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig were extremely influential on Danish religious traditions, emphasizing service and universal brotherhood (Foighel, 2007; Pelikan, 1987). One may infer that these traditions focused on universal brotherhood were, in some ways, influential to the Danish priests’ decision to preach resistance on the Sunday before the planned roundup of Jews.

**Narrative’s role in sustaining the rescue.**

Those who heard firsthand stories of the rescue point to several key narratives which helped to support and sustain rescue efforts in Denmark. Ole, for example, recalled that “the speech delivered by priests in churches was very influential. It was seen as a message authorized by the Bishops, . . . stating that ordinarily you must obey the laws of the state, but sometimes God’s law is more important—and this is one of those times.”

Ole, whose Jewish grandfather was pivotal in organizing rescue efforts, noted three additional sources of resistance and rescue narratives: illegal Swedish radio, the illegal press, and the stories related to the

Danish government stepping down once the Germans imposed martial law:

Illegal Swedish radio was received and widely heard. . . . The story of Sweden taking Jews was widely heard. The illegal press, put out by the Resistance [a very disparate group of Communists and conservatives], put out stories about what is happening to our heroes of the Resistance. . . . They immediately condemned the actions taken by the Germans: “Here is yet another example of how brutal our occupiers are.” At the same time, there was [the] largely symbolic action of the Danish government stepping down that was immensely significant to people.

### **The decision to help.**

Those who heard stories of the rescue identified two key components underlying the decision to help. Alice and Morton both identified “moral, political, or religious beliefs” as fundamental to this decision. A number of interviewees also identified a common and long-lived hatred of the Germans as a key factor. Ole believed that this antipathy had begun with the War of 1864, when Denmark lost a third of its territory to the Germans. Betty noted that “much of the Danish Resistance was aimed at fighting Germans. . . . Many of the stories I heard were about the Danes’ relationship to the Germans.”

### **Return.**

Bent noted two significant aspects related to the Jews’ return to their Danish homeland. One was that many stories and homes were cared for by Christian neighbors: “One of my classmates in Lundt—his family had to close their store when they went to Sweden. When they returned, the store was just as they had left it. . . . My mother had come to Sweden in ’44 [and] the apartment was just as she had left it.” However, he also spoke of a certain degree of resentment that the refugee Jews experienced upon their return to Denmark. “There was some resentment in Denmark of the Jews that went to Sweden because of the hardship in Denmark.” Ole confirmed that he also heard stories of non-Jewish Danish citizens’ resentment:

There was a sense that when people were in Sweden they had enough to eat, they could work, they could wear nice clothes . . . while here, people suffered. Of course it wasn't as simple as that. In Sweden, maybe you lost relatives to the camps, maybe your marriage broke up under the strain of dislocation, maybe you had to struggle to find work. . . . But it was problematic to watch Jews coming back from Sweden in their best clothes. . . . People had a week in Sweden after coming back from Theresienstadt . . . so they bought a nice dress, they had their nails painted. . . . Never mind that they spent two years in a camp where any day they could be taken to their death. . . . When survivors came back, they looked "normal," . . . so there was some resentment and jealousy.

### **Responses to the Stories of Rescue Survivors**

The Danish refugee Jews in Sweden were enlisted to join a "Danish Brigade" to fight any German Resistance once they returned to Denmark. Bent spoke of this:

In the summer of '44, the oldest students in the gymnasium were asked to join the Danish Army, a "police force" deployed on the Allied side, in case the war drags on. . . . We formed a brigade with the intention to fight the Germans. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, we loaded a boat with hospital supplies. . . . We arrived at the city opposite Helsingborg on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. We didn't know what happened in Denmark. All we knew was that the German Army was receiving us [and] we were prepared to fight. . . . But when we arrived, we received a Danish celebration.

Ole noted, "The Danish Brigade was a way to serve, [and] also a way to show you were Danish . . . . Some were very recent immigrants, but many Danish Jews wanted to step up and serve." Morton revealed that he has always tried to talk about what he learned from the Danish rescue to others: "I always try to convey the sentiments I learned from these accounts to others in the numerous opportunities I've had to give talks on the subject of moral courage and altruistic behavior in a wide variety of contexts."

Leon Falik, in his foreword to Goldberger's (1987) *The Rescue of the Danish Jews*, notes that an organization called Tribute to the Danes was formed in the United States in 1966. The organization's purpose was

“to see to it that the story of the Danish rescue of 1943 was made known far and wide all over the world” (p. xii).

### **Responses of Those Who Heard Firsthand Accounts**

Alice noted that her children seemed to be proud of the actions of rescue and resistance taken by her parents. She believes that it has influenced their choices and their work. “I think our boys are proud of this, especially R. . . . He has been working at children’s hospitals all over the world, . . . traveled all over Asia. . . . He was always involved in dangerous situations . . . which we would find out about later.”

Ole saw the stories of rescue as having wide political impact upon Denmark itself:

The stories of rescue were told to Danish children for years after the war in storybooks. These stories influenced the way Denmark viewed itself. Politicians are constantly referring to “The Story of ’43” as a rationale for an open liberal policy toward refugees. It [the story] was instrumental in forming the idea of Denmark as a liberal, tolerant country.

Finally, several respondents said that the stories of rescue have helped to clarify and express their values. Sally explained that “they’ve made life clearer [and] made me want to seek out more. . . . More about history [and] also by trying to do something good every day. . . . Being conscious about modeling it for my daughter.” Betty reported a similar response:

I think that I am a better person because I know that people have done this before. . . . This is a piece of what I believe, . . . to the point now that my life is my own except my elderly mom is now [nearby] and my middle daughter has one of those lives that is not easy, except for those, both whom I adore, I would find a mission. It doesn’t have to be a specific faith way . . . of doing good.

### **Themes**

The distinct categories that emerged from the interviews were the firsthand accounts of survival during the Holocaust; the stories themselves; the responses of survivors of the Holocaust to those stories;

and the responses of individuals who were exposed to stories of survival, helping, and rescue during the Holocaust (but were not survivors themselves). The themes we'll discuss are considered within these discrete categories as well as within their distinct political and geographical contexts.

### **Themes from Stories of Rescue on Zakynthos**

Two associated themes from the stories we heard in our interviews with residents of Zakynthos had to do with what was described by Demetrius, Thomas, and Mia as the “different values” of Zakynthians and a broad, inclusive sense of identity on the island that fostered among islanders identification with people from other social and religious groups. In a later interview, Demetrius clarified that distinctions existed between economic classes, but any group could become a part of any of the classes.

The “different values” of Zakynthians seemed to include a focus on “a good name,” which appeared to be earned or maintained by helping behaviors that promoted inclusion. The broader sense of identity theme that emerged from our interviews, which spoke to a social inclusivity present on the island, appeared to have been generated by a sense of neighborliness. The stories of mutual help between Jews and Christians and the pivotal role of the church in the rescue of Jews attest to that sense of neighborliness. These two themes—of different values and of a broader sense of identity—both appeared to be tied to the theme of mutual respect. These thematic elements echo the findings from Monroe's (2002, 2004, 2011) interviews of rescuers; her interviews also uncovered a link between helping identities and attitudes of social inclusivity/connection with others.

The support that island leaders gave to rescue and sheltering efforts is another prominent theme. Over and over again, we heard that the citizens of Zakynthos “had support from the leadership,” that “they were not alone.” The story of the leadership's resistance to Nazi orders clearly had a profound effect on the islanders at the time of the Occupation.



### **Themes Related to the Responses of Survivors to Stories of Rescue on Zakynthos**

One of the themes to come out of the responses of survivors to the stories of rescue was concrete expressions of gratitude, symbolized best by the gift of the church windows. The second theme was the desire to tell the story of rescue to others. Mia told us that “My uncle organized many of the survivors, and this brought connections for me to other children of survivors.”

### **Themes Related to the Responses of Zakynthians Who Heard Stories Firsthand**

Several of the interviewees stated that they had grappled with the question of what they would have done if they had faced the circumstances of the people in the stories of rescue on Zakynthos. Demetrius observed:

I haven’t passed a real test. If there was forced labor; if there was a rifle to my head: then it would be clear how I felt. . . . I feel I would have done the same thing with my people in my village. . . . For example, now, if someone makes a nasty comment, I reply in a verbal way, but that is not a lot of verbal effort. I don’t feel threatened. I don’t care about the cost, I would try to stand up. But the only cost is that I am not going to be close friends; there is no actual threat. I have to give people who were there more credit. I don’t know how I would react if there was a shotgun put to my head.

These respondents—who grew up surrounded by the stories of rescue—indicated that the stories of shelter illustrate the value of helping others in need, and they acknowledged that they were inspired to stand up and help those in distress: “I published a poem about Bosnia in the local newspaper after I read about the bombing there. Many islanders called the paper after they published the poem and they gathered supplies to help people of Bosnia” (Mr. I).

### **Themes from the Stories of Rescue in South and Central Greece**

The stories of rescue in South and Central Greece involve constant danger and constant movement, both for those in hiding and, to some extent, those who helped with rescue efforts. The sense of danger and the need to keep moving were dominant themes from the interviews with individuals from this region.

### **Themes Related to the Responses of Survivors in South and Central Greece**

Survivors whom we interviewed focused on the horror involved in losing their communities as well as most (if not all) of their property and assets. Efforts to reciprocate help were made at whatever level was possible for the survivors we spoke with, many of whom were impoverished and left without any sustaining community in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

### **Themes Related to the Responses of Those Who Heard Firsthand Stories in South and Central Greece**

An added dimension was suggested by those who heard firsthand stories of help from this region. These individuals believed the stories to be foundational to their identity development because the stories were shared by significant others and because they were told repeatedly.

### **Themes Related to the Stories of Rescue in Denmark**

From our interviews in Denmark, one emerging theme was an attitude that the helping behavior in the stories of rescue “was nothing special.” In Denmark, there appeared to be “networks of help” and organized resistance efforts. The decision to help often appeared to be congruent with the moral, political, and religious beliefs of many of the citizens.

In Denmark, several key stories appeared to mobilize and sustain the rescue. The story that was perhaps most central to the continued efforts to help (and which provided the most inspiration to others) was the story of the Danish government “stepping down” in protest to German “emergency measures” and the Nazi Occupation. It was a largely symbolic and yet immensely powerful act.

### **Themes Related to Stories Heard and Expressed by Danish Survivors**

Jews who survived as a result of the Danish rescue efforts during the Holocaust described a desire to “step up and serve.” Young people enlisted in the Scouts in Sweden and were told that they might have to help in case of an eventual German invasion. Ole believed that Swedish efforts to enlist Jewish young people in the Scouts was an effort to keep the refugees busy and productive. Those in the Danish Brigade were prepared to fight when they arrived in Denmark, but there was little resistance from the retreating German Army. Survivors who had found refuge in Sweden also described the experience of being met with a certain degree of resentment by some Danes when they returned to Denmark. Those Danes who had stayed behind imagined life in Sweden as easier than it was in occupied Denmark. Survivors expressed the wish to tell the story of their rescue to others. The story itself is seen as immensely influential to the development of Denmark as a liberal and tolerant country.

### **Themes Related to the Responses of Those Who Heard Firsthand Stories in Denmark**

Those who had relatives in the Resistance or who participated in rescue efforts expressed pride in their forbears. Some had taken up a life of service, in part because they’d been inspired by these stories and had been exposed to the modeling behavior of their elders. Others, having heard stories from non-relatives, described a clear articulation of their own values and a desire to more freely express those values after hearing the stories of rescue in Denmark.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the question of the influence of aural modeling on the generation during and after incidences of heroic helping during the Holocaust. This question is critical because visual models, or the ability to begin helping (even with small gestures) may be attenuated by fear, persecution, isolation, or any number of factors present in catastrophic situations. There is evidence cited here that stories, especially stories told over and over again by significant others, are influential to the development of a helping identity. Telling a story about active caring involves proximity, expression, a shared environment, and

connection to the listener, as well as engagement of the listener's imagined world.

Listening to stories told by the individuals who lived them invite the listener to engage in the story-making process, and therefore invite involvement in a narrative about caring. This involvement has the potential to nurture and sustain networks of helping and resistance. Stories of active helping also have the potential to support and refine choice-making and defensive strategies which will ultimately shape identity. Monroe (2011) suggests that we "examine external stimuli that trigger critical aspects of our multifaceted and complex identity in a manner that either does or does not make us notice and accord moral salience to that suffering of others" (p. 375). There is evidence here that stories of active helping in the face of suffering may draw our attention, in an active way, to the moral salience of another's suffering and active responses to that suffering.

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