



# Moral Courage

The Other Side  
of Faith

Teacher's Guide

"...Highlighting acts of moral courage by individuals or groups who have helped to change the events within their community or country."



The Foundation for Moral Courage,  
in partnership with South Carolina ETV,

presents

# *Moral Courage*

*A seven-part series  
“highlighting acts of moral courage  
by individuals or groups  
who have helped to change  
the events within their community or country”*

## *The Other Side of Faith*

Teacher’s guide developed by  
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Suggested Grade Levels  
5th–12th

Subject Areas  
Social Studies, U.S. History, World History,  
Language Arts, Character Education

# Moral Courage

*Moral Courage* identifies ordinary people who became extraordinary through their acts of great personal courage, and underscores the importance of a shared commitment to universal human values. These seven television documentaries focus on the unique lifesaving stories of rescue extended to Jewish fugitives during the Holocaust period.

The series consists of the following programs.

## **TREASON OR HONOR**

(1998) *Narrated in English by Uta Hagen and in German by Anna Rosmus.*

This program introduces six German nationals, recognized by Yad Vashem, who found it possible in the center of Nazi tyranny to hide and protect German Jewish fugitives. Why they accepted the risk of defying German law is as important to understand as how they rescued these people. [28 minutes]

## **IT WAS NOTHING...IT WAS EVERYTHING Reflections on the Rescue of Jewish Fugitives in Greece During the Holocaust**

(1997) *Narrated by Irene Papas.*

Highlighting the almost total destruction of Greece's Jewish community, this program offers dramatic archival footage and Ladino music to complement interviews with rescuers and a few who were rescued in Thessaloniki, Athens, Crete, and in other important locations. [29 minutes]

## **ZEGOTA: THE COUNCIL FOR AID TO JEWS IN OCCUPIED POLAND, 1942–1945**

(1997) *Narrated by Eli Wallach.*

This is a story of the desperate plight of the Jews of Poland and the conditions of terror under which Zegota rescuers tried to help. Zegota participants, Jewish survivors, and Polish and Jewish historians recall and reflect on the unparalleled crime of genocide committed by Nazi occupation forces, and on the extraordinary courage of people who risked—and some of whom sacrificed—their lives trying to save some Jewish fugitives. [28 minutes]

## **A DEBT TO HONOR**

(1995) *Narrated by Alan Alda.*

In spite of the fact that Italy was allied with Nazi Germany until its surrender to the Allies in September 1943, 80 percent of Italy's Jews survived the Holocaust. Many found safety and friendship with the clergy and others with ordinary citizens, both groups becoming heroic through their far-reaching rescue efforts. [29 minutes]

## **RESCUE IN SCANDINAVIA**

(1994) *Narrated by Liv Ullmann.*

Thousands of Danes and Norwegians found it possible to guide Jewish fugitives across their borders to safety in Sweden. Raoul Wallenberg's and Count Folke Bernadotte's stories of rescue are told in this film, along with the unique story of protection extended by the government of Finland to its Jewish community while that country was allied with Nazi Germany in their common war against the Soviet Union. [55 minutes]

## **ZEGOTA: A TIME TO REMEMBER**

(1992) *Narrated by Sy Rotter.*

The highest percentage of almost 20,000 "righteous gentiles" honored by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Remembrance Museum in Israel, for their having rescued Jews during the Second World War are Polish. Their efforts are highlighted in this program, which includes an epilogue by Jan Karski. [52 minutes]

## **THE OTHER SIDE OF FAITH**

(1991) *Narrated by Sy Rotter.*

In the town of Przemysl, Poland, it was possible, even under the strictest Nazi occupation regulations, for a 16-year-old Polish girl and her younger sister to successfully hide and nurture 13 Jewish fugitives—men, women, and children—for over two years. This is their inspiring story. [27 minutes]

# How to Use *This Guide*

## Guide Components

- **Pre-Teaching Material**
  - People
  - Places
  - Vocabulary
- **Timeline: Important Events of World War II**
- **Historical Background**
- **Maps**
- **Video Synopsis**
- **Classroom Activities**
  - Participatory Lessons
  - Classroom Discussion
  - Handouts
- **Selected Resources**
  - Bibliography
  - Videos
  - Web Sites

*Moral Courage* is delivered in seven programs. The guide for each program contains the components pre-teaching material, historical background, video synopsis, and classroom activities. Some programs contain specific bibliographies, videos, and Web entries. The instructor may use these components in a variety of ways.

- To provide a map through the program, as the pre-teaching material is organized in the order in which it is viewed or mentioned.
- To guide student viewing of the program. A written outline for students to follow can keep them focused and enhance student understanding.
- To assure that students are paying attention to the programs by having them listen for and define/identify the content of these sections, as basic factual questions do not do enough to challenge students' higher-order thinking skills.
- To set up the scenes and provide historical background for the lesson before viewing.

Note that the classroom activities and the classroom discussions for each program contain activities that may be used with many of the other videos.

The selected resources—bibliography, videos, and Web sites—can be used by both the instructor and the students. These are *selected* and are not meant to be all-inclusive.

*Parts of this guide are taken wholly or partially from discussion guides prepared by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) for The Foundation for Moral Courage. Those parts are in italics.*

# The Other Side of Faith

“The Other Side of Faith” is a compelling witness to the exceptional courage of Stefania Podgorska Burzminski and her sister, Helena. The basic message imparted is that faith may also be found in the morality that transcends religious and ethnic boundaries, which we can recognize as our common humanity. For nearly two and a half years, they provided refuge for 13 Jewish men, women, and children hidden in the attic of their small home.

## Pre-Teaching Material

**People** (in the order viewed and/or mentioned)

**Josef Burzminski:** Escaped from a boxcar transporting him to the Belzec death camp and went to Stefania for assistance.

**Stefania Podgorska Burzminski:** Now married to Josef, she hid 13 Jewish men, women, and children in the attic of a small home.

**Helena Podgorska:** A six-year-old child who assisted her sister in this act of moral courage.

**Hennick and Danuta:** Josef’s brother and the brother’s fiancée.

**Places** (in the order viewed and/or mentioned)

Przemysl

Poland

Belzec death camp

**Vocabulary** (in the order used in the video)

Ghetto

Gestapo

## Timeline: Important Events of World War II

- 1921 July 29:** Adolf Hitler becomes the leader of the National Socialist "Nazi" Party.
- 1930 September 14:** The Germans elect the Nazis; it is the second-largest political party in Germany.
- 1933 January 30:** Adolf Hitler becomes the chancellor of Germany.
- March 12:** The first concentration camp opens at Oranienburg, outside Berlin.
- March 23:** The Enabling Act gives Hitler dictatorial power.
- April 1:** Hitler orders the Nazi boycott of Jewish-owned shops.
- May 10:** The Nazis burn books.
- June:** The Nazis open the Dachau concentration camp.
- July 14:** The Nazi party is declared the only party in Germany.
- August 19:** Adolf Hitler becomes the führer of Germany.
- September 15:** The Nuremberg Laws take away Jewish legal rights.
- 1936 February 10:** The German Gestapo is above the law.
- March 7:** German troops occupy the Rhineland.
- 1938 March 12/13:** Germany announces "Anschluss" (union) with Austria.
- October 15:** German troops occupy the Sudetenland; the Czech government resigns.
- November 9/10:** Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass)
- 1939 March 15/16:** Germany takes Czechoslovakia.
- September 1:** Germany attacks Poland from the west; the Soviet Union attacks Poland from the east.
- September 27:** Poland surrenders to Germany.
- October:** Germany begins euthanizing the sick and disabled in Germany.
- 1940 April 9:** Germany invades Denmark and Norway.
- May 15:** Holland surrenders to Germany.
- May 28:** Belgium surrenders to Germany.
- June 10:** Norway surrenders to Germany.
- June 14:** The Germans enter Paris.
- July 10:** The Battle of Britain begins.
- October 7:** German troops enter Romania.
- 1941 April 17:** Yugoslavia surrenders to Germany.
- April 27:** Greece surrenders to Germany.
- June:** German SS Einsatzgruppen begin mass murder of Polish Jews.
- July 31:** Göring instructs Heydrich to prepare for the Final Solution—the murder of all European Jews.
- September 1:** Germany orders Jews in Germany to wear yellow stars.
- September 3:** The first experimental use of gas chambers at Auschwitz occurs.
- September 19:** The German army takes Kiev.
- September 29:** The German army murders 33,771 Jews at Babi Yar, near Kiev.
- December 11:** Germany declares war on the United States.
- 1942 January 20:** The Wannsee Conference to coordinate the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" convenes.
- June:** Mass murder of Jews by German forces, by gassing, begins at Auschwitz.
- July 22:** Deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to German killing centers begin; the Treblinka death camp opens.
- 1943 February 18:** The Nazis arrest White Rose resistance leaders in Munich.
- April:** The Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto begins.
- May 16:** Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto is crushed by German troops.
- June 11:** Himmler orders the liquidation of all Jewish ghettos in Poland.
- 1944 June 6:** D-Day landings.
- July:** The Polish army-led uprising against the German army begins in Warsaw.
- July 24:** Soviet troops liberate the first concentration camp at Majdanek.
- August 4:** Anne Frank and her family are arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam, Holland.
- August 25:** Liberation of Paris.
- October 2:** The Warsaw Uprising ends as the decimated Polish Home Army surrenders to the Germans.
- October 30:** The gas chambers at Auschwitz are used by the Germans for the last time.
- December 17:** German Waffen SS murder 81 U.S. POWs at Malmedy.
- 1945 January 26:** Soviet troops liberate Auschwitz.
- April 12:** The Allies liberate Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.
- April 29:** The U.S. 7th Army liberates Dachau.
- April 30:** Adolf Hitler commits suicide.
- May 7:** Germany signs an unconditional surrender to the Allies.
- May 8:** V-E (Victory in Europe) Day.
- August 6:** Hiroshima, Japan, is the target of the first atomic bomb.
- August 9:** Nagasaki, Japan, is the target of the second atomic bomb.
- August 15:** The Japanese government surrenders; V-J (Victory over Japan) Day.
- September 2:** The Japanese sign the surrender agreement.
- October 24:** The United Nations is officially born.

## Historical Background

*Historical records verify that Jews have lived in Poland since the middle of the 10th century. During the Middle Ages, Poland was the only country in Europe to welcome Jews as they were expelled from England, Spain, and Portugal and fled from persecution in France and Germany. At the time of partition of Poland by Germany, Austria, and Russia in the late 18th century, there were far more Jews living within the borders of Poland than in any country in the world.*

*During the 16th and 17th centuries, Polish Jews enjoyed a cultural and religious freedom unsurpassed anywhere. The large Jewish populations in the cities of Vilna, Warsaw, and Lodz became renowned centers for biblical studies. However, from the beginning of Poland's partition in 1878 through the end of World War I, a series of restrictive edicts and procedures made life increasingly difficult for the more than 3 million Jews living in the three occupied areas under the control of Austro-Hungary, Russia, and Prussia.*

*Although Poland was restored as a nation at the end of the First World War, the 20 years that followed was a time of great economic and political stress. Jewish citizens found themselves subjected to increasing governmental and social restrictions. Anti-Semitism, long an underlying reality in broad segments of Polish life, was further exacerbated by the harsh economic conditions of the time. The world was experiencing a profound economic depression; in Poland, there was a 20 percent unemployment rate. Many Poles, influenced by fascist-oriented political propaganda, blamed what they considered to be hostile Jewish influences for the economic problems of the country.*

*On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded western Poland, which was annexed and placed under German occupation. A short time later, the Soviet Union also invaded Poland and annexed the eastern area.*

*Resentment over Poland's lost independence increased the anti-Semitic feelings of some Poles. The fact that some Jews were fleeing to the relative safety of Soviet-occupied Poland, and later the Soviet Union, fueled this resentment. On the other hand, some Poles, viewing their own oppression as parallel to that of the Jews, were sympathetic and supportive.*

*In June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. In the process, all of Poland came under German control. A tragic litany of edicts issued by the German occupation authorities led to the virtual demise of Jewish life in Poland. At first, Jews were forced to wear the Star of David on their outer clothing. Jewish-owned property and businesses were then confiscated. The Jews were then forced to live in segregated areas (ghettos), which were sealed off from the rest of the population by troops and barbed wire. Living conditions in the ghettos were abominable, and thousands died of starvation and disease.*

*The German decree to murder all Jews—the “Final Solution”—was made official at the Wannsee Conference in Germany in January 1942. There followed a systematic deportation of Jews from Nazi-imposed ghettos to concentration camps and killing centers constructed in Poland and in other parts of Europe. Most of these places were established in Poland by the Germans. In these camps, people suffered humiliation, torture, and death by many means, including poisonous gas.*

*At the end of the war, 90 percent of Polish Jewry had been killed. Of the 300,000 Jews still alive, most had been saved by escaping into the USSR. Some had survived the concentration camps when the Germans had not had sufficient time to kill them. But some survived thanks to the courageous efforts of Polish people who hid and cared for them through both individual and organized efforts.*



# **POLAND**

## Video Synopsis

*In late 1942, Josef Burzminski, son of Stefania's former employer, escaped from the train taking him to the Belzec death camp. He returned to Przemysl, and sought refuge with Stefania and her sister, Helena. Guided by her faith, Stefania was able to hide Josef and 12 other Jews in her home for two and a half years. In "The Other Side of Faith," Josef describes the secret wall he constructed in the attic, which allowed the 13 to hide in moments of danger. He shows where they were forced to lie on the floor, head to foot, like sardines, with barely enough headroom to sit up.*

*During this time, Stefania and Helena were in constant danger of being discovered by the Gestapo. Stefania describes how she witnessed the hanging of an entire Polish family, whom the Germans had caught hiding Jews. Yet, despite her fear of the consequences, Stefania remained steadfast in her commitment to protect the Jewish fugitives who depended on her actions for their safety.*

*Toward the end of the war, the Gestapo commandeered Stefania's home. She was forced to share her small living space with two German nurses and their German soldier friends, who were unaware of the Jews hidden in the attic. "My feeling was terrible," says Stefania, "and every night I prayed to God."*

*Liberated by the Russian army, Stefania and her sister were proclaimed heroes by the Russian soldiers. Stefania, however, maintains that she was not a hero. She says, "I just did what I thought I should do."*

*Stefania Burzminski has been honored by the Righteous Among the Nations program of Yad Vashem, the State of Israel's official Holocaust museum and archive. She has also been honored by Jewish and Polish organizations in America, where she now makes her home with Josef, whom she married after the war.*

## Classroom Activities

### Participatory Lessons

- Before viewing, use the map handout to locate the sites mentioned in the video, review the vocabulary words, and give students the names mentioned in the program. Use the timeline and historical background to set the stage for the video. This preparation will broaden students' viewing experience.
- Josef Burzminski tells us that 13 people lived in Stefania and Helena's small attic. Make an outline or "task list" as to what sorts of undertakings must occur everyday to care for 13 people. How does this list compare to the students' own daily "tasks"? Is being a hero always glamorous? In what everyday ways might students show individual acts of courage?

- Designate a week when students in the class place a sticker on other students whom they witness performing an “everyday act of courage” or kindness “above and beyond.”

## **Classroom Discussion**

- *Define or describe heroism. Is Stefania a hero? Is Josef a hero? Do you know any heroes? Why do you think they are heroes?*
- *What does the title “The Other Side of Faith” mean to you?*
- *In what way did Stefania and Josef demonstrate their commitment to the “other side of faith”?*
- *Do you know any people for whom faith is important in guiding their actions?*

## **Selected Resources**

### **Bibliography** (specific to the Polish Experience)

Adler, Morris. *Jewish Heritage Reader*. Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1965.

Lerski, George, and Halina Lerski. *Jewish-Polish Coexistence, 1772–1939*. Greenwood Press, 1986.

Vishniac, Roman, and Elie Wiesel. *A Vanished World*. Noonday Press, 1986.

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