

08 September 2019 – Bevrijdingsfeesten – Stadspark Antwerpen

Your Majesties, Your Excellencies, Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
and Dear Friends

Liberation for the Jewish people.

Following the liberation of Antwerp, Holocaust survivors set forth on their new journey – the quest for a new life, home, and family. While friends and families were gone and pre-war lives destroyed, they needed to find the strength to start a new life, build a new home and create new families.

Often they suppressed the trauma they had lived through during the Holocaust, pushing it to the backs of their minds, distancing themselves from the terror and the grief in order to be able to embrace their new lives.

Despite their best efforts to “move on”, for many, this gave way to emotional and psychological difficulties. The trauma of the Holocaust, quite obviously, did not end with the liberation.

Heden, 75 jaar na het einde van die vreselijke oorlog, is het voor mij eerst en vooral een eer en een plicht om publiekelijk en heel officieel enkele Belgische mensen te danken.

Zij die de moed hadden om echt mens te blijven
Zij die tijdens de meest donkere en gevaarlijke tijd van onze geschiedenis de Joodse gemeenschap in leven hebben gehouden.
Zij de Vlamingen, de Brusselaars en mensen uit Wallonië die in contrast stonden met het gevoel van onverschilligheid en vijandigheid dat zekere anderen overheerste tijdens de Shoah.
Zij die “Rechtvaardige Belgen” hebben niet enkel Joodse mensenlevens gered, maar ook de eer van België.
Zij hebben hun eigen leven op het spel gezet om mensen te helpen in leven te blijven, die zij dikwijls één dag daarvoor helemaal niet kende.

Meer dan 5.000 kinderen onder de 15 jaar werden van de Dossin kazerne te Mechelen naar Auschwitz gevoerd en daar verdwenen zij van de aardbol.

Maar hier in België heeft de bevolking van alle lagen van de gemeenschap meer dan 5.000 kinderen uit de handen van de moordenaars gered en hun de kans geboden om na de oorlog een nieuw leven te beginnen, een gezin te stichten, een toekomst op te bouwen.

The Committee for the Defence of Jews was not alone in helping to save Jewish children.

Help also came from the wider Belgian population and the National Child Welfare organisation where Mrs. Jospa had been working for many years. It was there that she found the contacts to place the children.

The Catholic institutions also made a major contribution in rescuing Jewish children. The network of Father Bruno Reynders was successful in saving about

400 children by enabling them to go into hiding, thanks to the underground network that he had founded at the Abbey in Leuven.

One of the ladies from that Committee is still alive and lives in Brussels. Her name is *Andrée Geulen*. As a young school teacher in Brussels, she personally sought out and collected 300 children from the homes of their parents and took them to families who were prepared to hide them.

Can anyone here imagine what that must have been like: suddenly a lady whom you do not know comes to your home to take your child and you have no idea where your child will be taken?

What must have gone through the parents' minds to be forced to separate themselves from their children as the only option to keep them alive?

Even today, I cannot imagine that situation. Indeed, it was to keep the children safe, to keep them alive; but were the parents able to realise that? I still ask myself that question over and over again.

I hope that no one in the whole world will ever have to go through that experience again; and yet, has mankind understood what war means? Humanity has long forgotten what was said when the war was over: NEVER AGAIN.

When will that happen.

When will the world have peace??

Thanks to the "Righteous among the Nations"; we can believe in the goodness of mankind. We will never forget those people, as well as the Jewish underground fighters and soldiers who must be remembered and who have their rightful place in this story.

Dankzij "De Rechtvaardigen onder de Volkeren" hebben wij het geloof in de mensheid behouden.

Wij zullen ze nooit of nooit vergeten. Ook de Joodse weerstanders en Joodse jongens die zich aangesloten hebben om te vechten tegen de bezetter moeten in dit verhaal hun juiste plaats krijgen. Zij werden in de loop der jaren dikwijls vergeten

I myself was a very happy little girl during that terrible war. And why was that? because, I was very fortunate.

In 1942, my family were hidden: my parents, two brothers and myself, but we were betrayed. Fortunately, we were notified in time through the intervention of the Mayor of Hemiksem that we were no longer safe at that address, because he would have to collect us and bring us to Mechelen, to the Kazerne Dossin.

Charel, our neighbour, received a message from the Mayor's son to go and warn the people next door (my family) to flee as quickly as possible through the back door, as his father, the Mayor, would come through the front door. When Charel came to bring us the news, he suggested to my parents that they allow me to stay with him and his wife until my parents had found a safe hiding place, and then they could come to collect me.

They had no children of their own. I was less than three years old, and fortunately, I had blond hair and I had a Flemish name too, Regina; that was safe as people did not recognize me as a Jewish child.

The short time I was to spend with Anna and Charel turned out to be more than three years.

Anna and Charel became my parents throughout that period and they gave me everything. They had a grocery store, so I never knew what hunger was. They even had a bedroom just for me, and Anna's sister, Fietje, who was a seamstress, regularly made new clothes for me. Completely unaware of the disaster happening around me, I was a very, very happy child, thanks to their protection, their commitment and their love for me. In addition, my parents and brothers, who were in hiding in 15 different places throughout those three years, were also helped by Anna and Charel. Risking their own lives, they took me in, a little Jewish girl, and treated me like their own daughter. Charel even ran the risk of bringing food to my parents at the different addresses where they were hidden; he always managed to find them and supply them with food.

How can I describe such people? Even today, through all these years, I am still searching for the correct way, the correct words to describe these exceptional people. These people were extraordinary, and fortunately, they were not the only ones.

Such people make mankind more beautiful!

Nu het antisemitisme op een bedreigende manier weer de kop opsteekt, en dat sommigen de tragedie blijven ontkennen, die 6 miljoen Joodse mensen en zo vele anderen heeft getroffen, zie ik het als mijn absolute plicht te blijven getuigen, overal waar ik de kans krijg er over te vertellen, maar op de eerste plaats in de scholen, omdat onze jongeren en minder jongeren zouden meegaan in de strijd tegen het vergeten en tegen de ontkenning. Dat ze zich ideeën zouden vormen die leiden naar een betere wereld dan die van gisteren.

There should not be a difference between Jews, Christians, and Muslims or any other group of people in the world.

We will be forever grateful to all our saviours, not only for our lives but because their brave actions gave us the chance to live our lives as normal people, the same as everyone else.

I bear witness to this as I have lived my entire life, blessed with two sets of parents, one Jewish and one Christian, who provided me with a very exceptional life and without any problems between us.

So many years after the liberation of the city of Antwerp, on this Remembrance Day and within the spirit of a free world I wish for the whole world, Peace and Understanding among mankind.

Thank you

Regina Suchowolski-Sluszny

Voorzitter Forum der Joodse Organisaties

Vice-Voorzitter Het Ondergedoken Kind-L'Enfant Caché