Introduction

Shared Experiences, Divided Memories

Diplomats and Jewish Rescuers in Budapest, 1944–1945

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In June 2021, we received a letter from Asa Eger asking if we would like to write a foreword to his grandfather László Szamosi's 1945 memoir. We already knew Szamosi's name from several important sources on the history of the Hungarian Holocaust. Having read the diary-style memoir, we felt that it was an extremely important source that would be of interest to a wider audience. We immediately started working with the family: Szamosi's daughter Miriam Eger and Asa, and in parallel we also began to search for further documents to reconstruct the afterlife of the memoir more accurately. Hundreds of other documents were uncovered in the course of conversations with the family, and our own joint research added new facets to the book manuscript. It was also during this research that the original Hungarian translation of Giorgio Perlasca's memoirs, which had been lying dormant for almost 40 years, were discovered. And although we are experienced researchers, the story that we have uncovered and presented to you here has also held many surprises for us, some of them emotionally stirring. It is a rare privilege for a historian to work with some of the protagonists of her story. Working together with family members brings into sharper focus the historical and ethical issues that a Holocaust researcher can never ignore. In the process of selecting the documents, it became clear to us that the main novelty of the volume is the detailed presentation of its long afterlife. This not only makes the story of the 1944/45 Jewish rescue accessible and relatable, but also the struggles for recognition of László Szamosi that often made the life of the family bitter. As historians, we cannot turn our

heads away from this, but rather, we must analyze the discursive and institutional limitations that may have been behind these sad episodes. We are convinced that the presentation of Szamosi's memoir, together with these documents, is complete and correct. The volume therefore follows the structure of the cycles of memory work. This transgenerational memory work is less often mentioned in Holocaust studies, but if the Szamosi family had not been involved in the remembrance of the Hungarian Holocaust for 80 years, László Szamosi's diary would not be published today.

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Rescue in Budapest, 1944–1945

The Jewish population of rural Hungary was deported by Adolf Eichmann's staff, with the active help of the Hungarian authorities, in the spring and summer of 1944. The vast majority were deported to Auschwitz. Therefore, by mid-October 1944, at the time of the far right Arrow Cross party's takeover, the only significant number of Jews were living in Budapest. The protagonists of this book, László Szamosi and his wife Eugenia, lived with their two small children in a so-called yellow-star house at 39 Csengery Street, which had been designated for the relocation of Jews in Budapest. In the second half of 1944, the house was also topographically at the heart of events: the notorious Arrow Cross Party house at 60 Andrássy Street was located in its immediate vicinity, while a few hundred meters away, the Gestapo set up in one of Budapest's most prestigious hotels, the Grand Hotel Royal (today Corinthia Budapest, 43–49 Erzsébet Boulevard). On the evening of 15 October 1944, following the announcement of Governor Miklós Horthy's failed armistice attempt, a group of German SS soldiers and Hungarian Arrow Cross members murdered eighteen Jews and deported seventy others in another yellow-star house on this very street, 64 Csengery Street, only 160 meters from the house of the Szamosi family.[1]

After Miklós Horthy's failed armistice attempt, Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Arrow Cross Party, became prime minister of Hungary on 16 October with German help. In Budapest, Arrow Cross terror was raging, with armed gangs looting and in several cases murdering Jews living in yellow-star houses. On 18 October, the German ambassador Edmund Veesenmayer sent the following report to Berlin, which does not reflect the extent of the terror: "Individual incidents and murders against the Jews of Budapest are also on the agenda."[2]

The Szálasi government, hoping for international diplomatic recognition, stopped the arbitrary killing of Jews in the capital within a few weeks, but, in November 1944, it started again the deportation of thousands of

Jews to the camps of the Third Reich. Then, from the end of November, Arrow Cross terror was once again unleashed in the capital. It became clear to Szálasi that the Arrow Cross government would not be recognized by the neutral countries. Then, in December, the Soviet Red Army laid siege to the capital, and members of the Arrow Cross government and most of the neutral diplomats fled the city. Meanwhile, in Budapest, armed Arrow Cross gangs ran wild. They randomly broke into, robbed, and murdered Jews in children's homes run by international organizations, in hospitals, in the ghettos of Pest—everywhere. The Jewish victims were often simply shot into the Danube. The bodies of the murdered were taken to the Forensic Medical Institute in Budapest. After the war, one of the institute's staff recalled the victims as follows:

> As few as possible were simply shot, most were horribly tortured. The majority suffered for a long time, and from the horrible distortion of their faces you can tell that their suffering was excruciating. . . . Their specialties were eye-gouging, skinning, disemboweling, and limb-breaking.[3]

The siege of Budapest also claimed many other victims, as it was one of the most devastating city battles of World War II. Some 35,000 civilians, 80,000 Soviet soldiers and 50,000 German and Hungarian soldiers died in the fighting on the streets.[4] The fighting on the Pest side of Budapest, where the ghettos were located, ended on 18 January 1945, while on the Buda side a month later. The Arrow Cross era lasted for a few months in Budapest, but for the Jews living in the city it meant total insecurity and daily death threats.

In this period, after the German occupation of Hungary, and the Arrow Cross takeover, there were quite a few diplomats from neutral countries working in Hungary who, typically many years after the end of the war, were awarded high state honors for their activities in saving Jews in their home countries and in Israel.[5] One of them, Swedish diplomat Per Johan Anger (1913–2002), who was decorated with the Israeli "Righteous Among the Nations" award in 1981 and was the second secretary of the Swedish embassy in Budapest from 1942, said in a postwar interview about the dilemma faced by all his colleagues active in the Jewish rescue: "So what can we do? They were queuing up outside the embassies, pleading for help. . . What could we do? There was nothing in our books of instructions telling us how we could save people of other nationalities."[6]

Among these diplomats was the Swiss Friedrich Born (1903–1963), who worked in Budapest from May 1944 as a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross.[7] He was responsible for the organization and international protection of the children's homes in Budapest. In these orphanages, where Born worked closely with Jewish resistance

fighters, thousands of children and their relatives survived the war. Also doing a great deal for the persecuted Jews was Swiss diplomat Harald Feller (1913–2003), who headed the Swiss embassy in Budapest as chargé d'affaires from the end of 1944, after the ambassador Maximilian Jager left the country when the Red Army closed the siege around Budapest. Not only had Feller worked closely with other embassies and Jewish resistance fighters to rescue Jews, but he also personally rescued the writer Gábor Devecseri, his wife Klara Huszár, their one-year-old son and Huszár's parents. He hid the family in his home. In February 1945, the Soviet authorities arrested him and sent him to Moscow. He returned to Switzerland in early 1946.

We should also mention the Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz (1895–1975). During World War II, Switzerland represented the Allies in countries at war with them. Lutz was the so-called Foreign Interests Representative at the Swiss embassy. In the summer and autumn of 1944, he placed a total of seventy-seven houses under Swiss protection near the Szent István Park, which formed the basis of the later so-called international ghetto. Under the auspices of the Emigration Department of the Representation of Foreign Interests, Lutz made available to the Zionist resistance movements the so-called Glass House at 29 Vadász Street in the V. District.[8] Lutz was one of the initiators of the issue of protection letters and collective protection passports (Schutzbrief and Schutzpass), which in their original variation were issued to those who had a valid entry visa for Palestine. The Glass House and the courageous actions of the Zionist youth movements, as well as the significance of the various letters of protection in the rescue of Jews, are much discussed by László Szamosi and his wife Eugenia in their memoirs in this volume.

Swedish architect and diplomat Raoul Wallenberg (1912–1947[?]) arrived in Budapest in July 1944 as a secretary at the Swedish embassy. He was one of the main organizers of the Swedish embassy's rescue operation, and one of the most important actors in the diplomatic rescue of Jews in Hungary. In addition to the diplomats, Wallenberg also worked closely with Jewish resistance fighters active in the Jewish rescue. On 17 January 1945, he was arrested by the Soviet authorities and taken to Moscow. Most probably, according to Soviet reports, he died of a heart attack in Lubyanka prison in 1947.[9]

Valdemar Langlet (1872–1960), a Swedish linguist and university professor, became the head of the Swedish Red Cross office in Budapest on 19 March 1944. Thousands of Jews were fed and cared for in the city's Swedish Red Cross hospitals, soup kitchens, and children's homes. In May 1944, Langlet issued the first Swedish letters of protection. He and his wife Nina (1896–1988) also personally rescued people. For example, in

June, they took a protestant home-school teacher to look after their children. But the teacher was in fact a Jewish refugee from Poland, and they had no children.[10]

It is evident that a sizable number of diplomats working in Hungary did a great deal to ensure that thousands of Jews—mostly in Budapest—were saved from being deported to the forced labor camps of the Third Reich, or killed by Arrow Cross bullets in the streets of Budapest, and on the banks of the Danube. It is also clear, however, that the diplomats, who went far beyond the scope of their mandate, would not have been able to save so many people, despite all their good intentions and their determination to help, if they had not received constant and active help in their daily work from persecuted Jews who were trying to save their families, relatives, and friends—and, often, as many members of their community as possible. They were, for example, the ones who tried to get the letters of protection issued by the various embassies. They were also the ones who massively forged these protective documents, and who tried to collect the young children of Budapest Jews who had been deported to the Third Reich in the death marches, and who were left alone in yellow-star houses, to gather them in children's homes under international protection, and then to feed them during the siege of the capital. But as becomes increasingly clear from reading the recollections and interviews of Jewish "self-rescuers," in many cases it was they who initiated the rescue operations and then found courageous and committed partners in their non-Jewish environment, including diplomats in some cases.[11]

Such a "common history" is the story of László Szamosi and the Spanish embassy's actions to save the Jews, as reconstructed from Szamosi's 1945 memoir—published in this volume—and other contemporary and later sources.

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Rescue and Jewish Resistance: Giorgio Perlasca and László Szamosi

Following the German occupation of Hungary, Spanish ambassador Miguel Ángel Muguiro left Hungary on 5 April 1944 on the orders of the Spanish government. Ángel Sanz-Briz (1910–1980) became the head of the Spanish diplomatic corps in his capacity as chargé d'affaires.[12] Sanz-Briz soon became involved in the action to save the Jews, initiated by Swiss and Swedish diplomats, in which representatives of neutral countries sought to bring persecuted Jews under their authority by means of letters of protection. He found the legal basis for Spain to protect Jews living in

Hungary in a royal decree of 1924. King Alfonso XIII's decree stated that the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled in 1492 were entitled to return to Spain as Spanish citizens at any time. Under this decree, the Spanish embassy in Hungary issued identity documents to Jews. Sanz-Briz himself reported the action as follows:

> Since the officials in Hungary's Foreign Ministry remained the same as before the coup d'état, I used my existing contacts to ask for their help in persuading the Hungarian government to allow Spanish embassy protection for at least 200 Jews of Sephardic origin, who were therefore considered Spanish. Thus we achieved our most important goal: Hungary recognized the existence of Sephardic Jews and allowed Spain to act as their protector. The Hungarian government made the stipulation that the Jews under Spanish protection should be transported to Spain at Spanish expense, to which I gave my formal approval. The rest was easy: the permitted two hundred persons were first changed to two hundred families, and then the number of these families was multiplied, but the number of passports and protection letters issued never exceeded 200. These documents were issued and kept on file at the embassy, and numerous series were issued using the letters of the alphabet.[13]

In a report written to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16 December 1944, Sanz-Briz reported on the total number of documents issued by the embassy specifically for the purpose of rescue:

- Regular Spanish passports for Jews of Sephardic origin to return to Spain. This was granted to 45 people by mid-December.
- Temporary family passports were initially issued to 100 people. By mid-December 1944, 235 such passports had been issued to 352 people.
- So-called "protection passports" were issued to those who, according to their own statements, had relatives living in Spain or in Latin American countries represented by the Spanish embassy.

László Szamosi became a member of this team after the Arrow Cross takeover. According to a document dated 22 November 1944, it was from this time onward that Spanish diplomat Angel Sanz-Briz entrusted Szamosi, then an official of the International Red Cross, with the task of bringing back to Budapest "Spanish" deportees from the death marches, going from Budapest to the western border.[14] On 1 December, Szamosi was officially appointed to the Spanish embassy. On this day, Friedrich Born, the International Red Cross representative in Budapest, signed a letter informing Sanz-Briz that, on the basis of their preliminary discussions, he agreed to

"make Mr. Ottó Komoly engineer, and Mr. László Szamosi, employees of the Spanish Embassy."[15]

Then, early in December, as the Soviet siege closed, Sanz-Briz secretly left Hungary for Switzerland. But his departure did not mean the end of the Spanish rescue mission, as in addition to Komoly and Szamosi, the embassy staff too continued their work. Among them, two old colleagues should be mentioned. One is Elisabeth Tourné, a Hungarian woman who had a French husband and had been the embassy secretary since 1917. In this capacity, she issued and administered countless documents of protection. Another important member of the embassy's staff was legal advisor Zoltán Farkas, who was also actively involved in the issuance of protection documents and personally cared for the protected persons in the Spanish-protected houses of the international ghetto. Farkas died in the siege of Budapest in January 1945, having been hit by a grenade in the embassy building on Eötvös Street.

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According to various memoirs of survivors, it was Tourné and Farkas who asked Giorgio Perlasca to act as Spanish ambassador to the embassy left without any authority, following Sanz-Briz's departure in December.[16] In his memoirs, Szamosi wrote the following about their joint activities with Perlasca:

> From the beginning of December to about December 13th, Perlasca and I did the rounds of the Arrow Cross authorities and even entered several Arrow Cross houses where people were kept under arrest and appallingly tortured before being executed. We rescued very many people in this way from the clutches of the Arrow Cross. . . . In the streets, barricades had begun to spring up, as the Germans were able to convince the idiotic Arrow Cross that as the advance of the Russians from Stalingrad to Budapest had been unstoppable, it would be the heroic forces of the Arrow Cross defending Budapest that would be able to force the Red Army to retreat. Tank traps and barricades went up throughout the city, and so for a diplomatic vehicle to navigate the streets, orders renewed daily were necessary. On the 24th, too, they asked for the day's orders, so I persuaded Perlasca to come with me to the city command in Buda to pick up the day's orders. As we crossed over to Buda, at the Margaret Bridge we were surrounded by running soldiers and others in civilian dress. Perlasca became agitated and kept urging me to ask why people were running down southwards. I finally managed to get someone's attention, only to get an angry reply: Why, can't you see that the Russians are there! Perlasca roared that I should turn the car around, and I happily returned to Pest with the news that it was just a matter of two or three days before the whole awful business would be over.

Giorgio Perlasca returned to Italy after the war, where, in 1946, he also compiled a memoir and sent it to the Hungarian Jewish journalist Jenő Lévai,[17] who was working on several books about the Hungarian Jewish catastrophe.[18] In his memoirs, Perlasca wrote the following about Szamosi (whom he mistakenly referred to as Somogyi):

> He maintained contacts with the International Red Cross, and when I was without my driver, he offered to drive the vehicle on my dangerous rounds of besieged Budapest until he was wounded; he was always ready to come with me, even when he knew it was not certain that we would get back.[19]

Perlasca and Szamosi spoke with full respect for each other, praising each other for their personal courage during the weeks of the Arrow Cross terror. All this at a time when the Hungarian capital was the battlefield of the clash between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. They did not stay connected after the war: Szamosi with his family moved to Israel in 1949, and Perlasca returned to Italy from where he sent his memoirs, originally written to Lévai, to Italian newspapers, but as he received no response from any of them, he did not pursue the story further. However, he took with him two letters of thanks written in the spring of 1945. One was from the residents' committee of the largest former Spanish protected house (35 Szent István Park), dated 18 April, in which the grateful survivors wrote, among other things: "We must never, never forget that you not only worked day and night to provide us with food and shelter, but also cared for the elderly and the sick with a care that cannot be expressed in words. . . . we know how many times you risked your safety and your life to save us from the hands of murderers."[20]

In May 1945, the Hungarian delegate of the International Red Cross, Hans Weyermann, also thanked Perlasca for his work. He wrote: "In December 1944 and January 1945, the delegate personally witnessed the skill and dedication with which Mr. Perlasca . . . , often at the risk of his own life, came to the aid of the people under his protection, and protected them with complete success."[21]

In Hungary, some newspaper articles in the second half of the 1940s dealt with diplomatic rescue operations, including the role of the Spanish embassy. In one published on 12 June 1945, Sándor Mátrai reported that Perlasca, who was returning to Italy, had been farewelled that morning. According to the article, Perlasca had saved the lives of 5,200 people by posing as a Spanish diplomat.[22] A few days later, however, another article appeared in the newspaper *Szabadság*, which, referring to Mátrai's article, wrote that Perlasca's story was a "triumphalism," a kind of "self-polishing tall tale." According to the anonymous author of the article, the spirit of

the Spanish embassy's rescue work after the departure of Sanz-Briz was the embassy's legal adviser, lawyer Zoltán Farkas, who died a few days before the liberation of Budapest. The author of the article therefore doubted that Perlasca had been the driving force behind the embassy's rescue work, but he did acknowledge one brave act: "One evening in December, he went with a letter from the embassy to the Arrow Cross house at 2 Szent István boulevard and arranged for the release of two 'Spanish protégés' who had been taken in for not wearing the yellow star. That was all he did and nothing more."[23] The aforementioned Jenő Lévai, on the other hand, in his 1947 series of articles entitled "'Citizenship' instead of Letters of Protection", commemorated Perlasca, whom he considered "one of the most fantastic figures and heroes of defense actions."[24]

In the few years after the end of the war, the Hungarian press published several articles about diplomatic rescue operations, and even specifically about the role of the Spanish embassy. In the articles, a kind of debate also unfolded about who was the protagonist of the rescue operation—Perlasca or Farkas. The initial press reports may have reached Sanz-Briz, as he wrote a letter to Perlasca in 1945. Among other things, it states:

> I didn't know that you had taken over the embassy. As far as I know you, I am sure that everything you did was guided by your love for my country. Please accept my sincerest gratitude and expect nothing from anyone. *Neither your government nor anyone else's will recognize your merits.* Be satisfied with having done a good deed, and of having stood your ground during the terrible period of which we were all innocent victims. I am very sorry to hear about the death of my true friend Farkas. He was a good man. Please write to me and, if possible, tell me about everything that happened at the embassy after my departure. Please remember that the decision to admit people to the embassy buildings without prior permission from Madrid was entirely my own, and was motivated by the atmosphere of fear that prevailed in the Hungarian capital at the time. [our emphasis][25]

According to available sources, Sanz-Briz did not comment on the issue after this letter.

After the 1940s, the wartime rescue of Jews by the Spanish embassy in Budapest, which, according to the memoirs and survivor testimonies written at the time, was clearly a multi-actor operation, a real team effort, no longer made the headlines. The rescue teams were slowly replaced by prominent individuals, notably Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who was captured by the Soviets and, according to the most likely version, died in a Moscow prison in 1947. In Israel, the wartime leader of the Zionist movement in Hungary, Ottó Komoly, also became relatively well

known as a Zionist resistance fighter. Komoly was murdered by the Arrow Cross in Budapest in January 1945. In Israel, in 1953, Hungarian Holocaust survivors founded the settlement of Yad Natan, named after Ottó (Natan) Komoly.[26]

Eight Decades of Memory Work: The Szamosi Documents

László's Story

László Szamosi put his memories on paper after the liberation of Budapest, in October 1945. Her wife Eugenia, who typed them, used the same typewriter that she had earlier used to produce the Schutzpasses and fake documents. The memoir is twenty-eight typed pages long, in Hungarian, and tells the story of the period between October 1944 and 18 January 1945, in the first person. It reveals the daily ordeal of rescuing people with great accuracy and detail. It is an extraordinary historical source, as it contains many of the names, places, and events that were crucial to this period. The diary is very objective and condensed. Rather than portraying himself as either hero or main protagonist, Szamosi describes—often in "we"-narration—how, despite the permanent and simultaneous Arrow Cross massacres, the lives of thousands of Jewish children and adults were saved through occasional and regular cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork.

The importance of the memoir, written less than a year after liberation, and of the surviving documents was therefore known in the circles of survivor historians and journalists in Hungary and abroad at a relatively early stage, and there were no obstacles to its research. One of the leaders of the religious Zionists in Hungary from the 1930s and a member of the Steering Committee of the Palestine Office, Mihály Salamon, who became in 1944 one of the administrative managers of the Budapest Glass House Apparatus, the principal place for Jewish rescue and resistance, chronicled in his docufiction novel the Jewish rescue activities of the Glass House during the years 1944–45. The book, which was published in Israel in Hungarian, also mentioned Szamosi's activities.[27] (Szamosi and his wife were in contact with Salamon until his death.) Hungarian journalist, Holocaust survivor, and "self-made" documenter of the catastrophe, Jenő Lévai, mentions Szamosi by name in the *White Book* of 1946.[28] His story is also mentioned in *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: A Documentary Account* by the most important Hungarian Holocaust scholar and survivor Randolph L. Braham, who emigrated to the United States in 1948 and became the director of the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.[29] In his book *Rescue and Revolt*, Yitzhak Kashti also mentions Perlasca among the for-

eign diplomats active in the rescue: "He was 'appointed' as Spanish envoy by his friend Laci (László) Szamosi, who was active in the rescue, after the Spanish envoy Sanz-Briz left Hungary."[30] The chapter about the circumstances of Komoly's disappearance is based on Szamosi's memoir.[31]

The memoir and the historical documents have been resting in the Yad Vashem archives since the summer of 1958. When László Szamosi handed them over to Yad Vashem and gave an interview to its Archives, he received the following words from Yad Vashem's scholar Dr. Tivadar Lázár:

> Allow me once again to express my sincere thanks, now also on behalf of the management of our institute, for the extremely valuable historical treasure on the period of the Jewish extermination, which you have placed at the disposal of our institute, both in your own memoirs and in a document of the same period. It has been a particular pleasure for me to have had the opportunity to know you, a brave Jew and a righteous man.[32]

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László Szamosi also played a key role in making the history of the Shoah known to a wider public in Israel. From 1951 onward, he regularly gave commemorative speeches about Ottó Komoly, and cherished the memory of the Jewish resistance in the Hungarian Jewish community in Haifa. On 23 May 1967 he was awarded the "Fighters against the Nazis Medal" (*Ot halochem beNatzim*) from the State of Israel for his work in the resistance. In 1974, he became a representative of the World Federation of Hungarian Jews. One of his speeches in Beer Sheva in this volume bears witness to this.[33] Szamosi began it with the following:

> During Pesach while visiting my grandchildren in the States, my grandson Erik told me of his lessons in American History. He read the famous speech Lincoln gave in the midst of the American Civil War.[34] Its words still ring true today and, in the case of Raoul Wallenberg and the Jews of Budapest, the sentiment of Lincoln is as alive today as when the great American president spoke his words we remember. I am no student or scholar of history. But having witnessed and survived those trying times of the Hitler regime, I cannot ignore what my eyes have seen, or my heart has felt.[35]

In the 1960s and 1970s, László Szamosi maintained contact with the developing Hungarian Jewish academic community (e.g., Béla Vágó)[36] in Israel—this is evidenced by several letters in the family archive. He devoted the last eight years of his life to the memory of Raoul Wallenberg. He was interviewed by the American historian John Bierman in 1979–80 for his book on Wallenberg.[37] He was also interviewed on 8 December 1980,

when he and Bözsi went to the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, so Laci could give his oral history. In fact, it was a team testimony of both of them, and while mostly similar to the memoir, it filled in more details.[38] Laci's testimony helped get Wallenberg recognition worldwide. At the same time, the Bierman book earned Szamosi considerable fame, and numerous newspaper articles reported on his brave actions in 1944–45. In 1984, Szamosi made an English and Hebrew translation of his memoir and sent it to Yad Vashem. He continued to give lectures up until two years before he died in 1986.[39] The family archives contain eighteen newspaper articles from the early 1980s, which praise Szamosi. His memoir became the main source for two important films as well. One was a Canadian documentary,[40] the other a fiction, in which Szamosi's character was given a leading role, with his name and many details of the memoir filmed.[41] At the end of January 1986, Tom Kelemen, a Hungarian Jewish survivor, flew all the way from his home in Australia to Haifa, Israel to personally thank Laci for saving his life. Sadly, as he arrived, Laci was being taken by ambulance to the hospital. He died shortly after from a heart attack.[42] One can conclude that Szamosi has so far entered the hall of fame of underground Zionists in Israel.[43]

This could be the end of our story if Szamosi's death had not coincided with the discovery of Giorgio Perlasca. . .

Bözsi's Story

After 1945, Giorgio Perlasca lived in isolation in Italy. He stayed connected with only one of his Hungarian contacts, Irén Boroviczény, who worked for the International Red Cross during the war years.[44] She was the one who told a group of friends in Berlin in 1987 that the world only respects dead heroes like Raoul Wallenberg and usually forgets the still-living, for example Perlasca. In the group was Tibor Diamanstein, a university professor and Hungarian Jewish survivor, who, together with his friends, decided to get Perlasca some recognition and so, they turned to Yad Vashem in Israel. Diamanstein was told that the Righteous among the Nations medal is awarded to those whose actions can be witnessed by at least one survivor. As a result, an appeal appeared in the Jewish denominational newspaper *Új Élet* in Budapest on 15 May 1988, seeking survivors who could testify to Perlasca's activities. During June, several people came forward and wrote their memories. Among them Mrs. Pál Láng (b. Éva Königsberg) and Mrs. Dr. Tamás Vida (b. Veronika Berger), both survivors of the war and the Holocaust, and both lived in 35 Szent István Park. They remembered that Perlasca had regularly visited the protected house, bringing food and medicine to the residents, and, with the help of a police

officer, prevented the Arrow Cross from taking the already lined-up residents of the house to the Danube embankment, a few steps away from the house, and executing them there. The residents of the house had constantly heard, and sometimes secretly witnessed, the execution of Jews from other protected houses in the area and from the ghetto. They also remembered that Perlasca had been in contact with a "brave Zionist resistance boy," György Bárdos, who would ride his bicycle to the Spanish embassy to ask for help in case of danger. Bárdos did not live to see liberation and did not return from one of his trips.[45]

The testimonies of survivors were sent to Yad Vashem by the Berlin group. In the autumn of 1988, historian Sári Reuveni, the Hungarian affairs officer in Yad Vashem's Righteous among the Nations Department, and herself a Zionist resistance fighter in Budapest during the war years, traveled to Hungary.[46] "I am a historian, a Holocaust researcher, including the Hungarian Holocaust. I heard Perlasca's name a long time ago from my friend Jenő Lévai, but I didn't know he was alive."[47]

In November 1988, the elderly Giorgio Perlasca received the Yad Vashem Righteous among the Nations award in Italy, and in 1989 he traveled to Israel to plant a tree in the Forest of the Righteous in Jerusalem.[48] The Yad Vashem award started a real avalanche. In one fell swoop, Perlasca's name became known not only in his home country, and in Israel and Hungary, but also in the United States, the Netherlands, and many other places.[49]

Meanwhile, in Hungary, in August 1988, the aforementioned survivor Éva Láng, along with György Mészáros and the historian Mária Schmidt, wrote a letter containing several historical errors, and proposed Perlasca for a state medal. For example, it is clear from the historical documents that it was not Perlasca who issued most of the documents certifying Spanish citizenship. In addition, contrary to the letter's assertion, it is also not true that the Spanish rescue action is numerically comparable to the Swedish and Swiss operations. In their proposal, they wrote:

> We have learned that Giorgio Perlasca, an Italian antifascist, is still alive in Italy, who between November 1944 and January 1945 saved more than 5,000 Hungarian citizens of Jewish origin from deportation and death. Giorgio Perlasca organized, in collaboration with the Red Cross, the operation known in historical literature as the "Spanish rescue," where he saved the persecuted by issuing letters of protection. The scale of the operation was on a par with the better-known Swiss and Swedish rescue operations.[50]

As a result of the proposal, Perlasca was awarded the Order of the Star with a gold wreath of the Hungarian People's Republic by the Socialist Hungary on 21 November 1988.

After a long silence, from 1988 onward, events suddenly and unexpectedly accelerated. As a result, Eugenia Szamosi felt that the image of Perlasca in the world press was greatly exaggerated and that her husband's story was being covered up, appropriated by Perlasca. Her problem was not that Perlasca had been honored, but that he had been given a significance that she felt was greatly exaggerated. We know from family correspondence that she contacted Yad Vashem before Perlasca was honored and asked them to give a measured account of Perlasca's actions, using the Szamosi memoirs. When she saw that this was not happening,[51] she revoked the publication rights to the material she and her husband had submitted to Yad Vashem decades earlier:

> My present letter is the consequence of the fact that the serious rescue operations carried out in Budapest in 1944–45 by the Spanish embassy, and the consequent excessively high honors awarded to Mr. Giorgio Perlasca, have been published without any knowledge of the facts and with total disregard for reality. This happened despite my written application in May of this year, so that the matter could be dealt with in good time and with due restraint. Both my letter and the documentation placed in your hands were completely ignored.[52]

In 1990, after this difficult and probably painful conflict with Yad Vashem, Eugenia Szamosi turned to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) with the same memoirs and documents—and with the typewriter. The slightly edited version of her oral history is also published in our volume.[53]

These weeks had been busy in the oral history studio of the newly founded USHMM. This was the heroic period of this institution, when it started to establish its own testimony collection that now numbers more than eighty thousand. To this end, it placed several advertisements to find survivors of the Shoah. It was from one such advertisement that Bözsi heard about the opportunity. Three interviews were conducted in a few days, which are relevant for us. Independent Jewish historian and practicing psychotherapist Linda Kuzmack had interviewed not only Bözsi, but also Giorgio Perlasca and the child survivor Avraham Rónai. And although the interviews had been conducted in the same week and by the same interviewer, they were conducted under different conditions. Perlasca could give his testimony in his native language with the help of a translator on 5 August and 5 September 1990. The interview lasted five hours. He mentioned Szamosi in the context of Wallenberg:

> As I was telling you about Wallenberg, on the morning of the 18th [December 1944], the Russians took me, and they put me to sweep the

> streets. _____ Street. . . I had to sweep _____ Street. At a certain point I saw in front of a building a man whose name was _____[Szamosi] who, who, had been my chauffeur and who had been wounded driving my car. I wasn't there at the time. Uh my. . . in my position where I was seated, uh there was a police officer who was killed. He. . . and then the car was taken away and then the car was found again a few hours later but it was destroyed. This man has been my chauffeur to do me a favor and at the same time had, he had also, he had had ties with the International Red Cross because the delegate of the International Red Cross never showed his face. The human miseries. So I asked him, did you see Wallenberg? He said yes. He's here. Please, go, go fetch him. I can't move because there's this guy here with a machine gun, the GBU guy who, who is forcing me to sweep the street. After fifteen minutes or ten minutes though he came back. He says no, he's gone. He left a few minutes ago, and this is about eleven in the morning, but from then on nothing more was heard about Wallenberg.[54]

Kuzmack also conducted an hour-long interview with the Shoah survivor Avraham Rónai (who was one of the children saved by Perlasca) on 4 September 1990—in this case in Hebrew, and focusing only on the 1944–45 period and the rescuing activities of Perlasca.[55]

The last to be interviewed was Eugenia Szamosi on 12 September 1990. She could not give an interview in her native language or in Hebrew but had to speak English. It is now impossible to reconstruct why Perlasca was allowed to give a testimony in his native language while Rónai and Bözsi were not given the opportunity. It is also inexplicable why Rónai was allowed to speak to the same interviewer in his second native language, Hebrew, while Bözsi was not offered this opportunity. The 3.5-hour interview with Bözsi vividly conveys the mental and physical ordeal that Szamosi's wife endured with an infant and a two-year-old child during the Holocaust. And although the interviewer did not unpack the motives of personal survival with her questions, we see in several places in the interview that Bözsi took enormous risks beyond the care of the two children—and not only to save their own lives:

> There were about forty-six children, almost the same number of adult people like workers . . . they were working with the children, and the first evening I took something from myself, and I took my typewriter because this was a continuation of my hand. If I heard that I had to work on something, it was always in my mind connected with my typewriter. If I am working, I am working with my typewriter because I was not able to do any other work; so I took my typewriter and I was sitting there in an office room like half this size [the interview room at USHMM]. . . . I was occupied in the office. I wanted immediately to make lists about the

> names. There were children, and I said, who knows whose these children are? If somebody is of the age to tell their name it is OK, or if another from a neighbor knows that this is the name of this younger child. I was such a person to make some organization, some order, and I began to make some lists of who the children were, what their names were, which houses they were entering.

Perhaps this tiny detail shows the active agency of a young woman with two very small children to support. The theme of names runs throughout the interview. The Szamosis had to live with false papers and IDs. As a young mother of an infant and a two-year-old child who needed constant maternal presence, Bözsi performed important tasks in the sheltered home on Dob Street. She was not only in charge of her own children, but also of the other children kept there. She worked with a Jewish resistance group where these women's roles were both valorized and given a definite place in the group's division of labor by her professional typing skills.[56] Moreover, for Bözsi, names were the embodiment of identity, which is why she was so passionate about finding out the identities of the children who had been sent to the orphanage so that they could be reunited with their parents at the end of the war. For her, the loss of names was an almost unbearable burden: at several points of the interview, she protested against using someone else's name as her own. This is particularly moving in the light of the fact that she knew well that this was the only way they would have a chance of hiding.[57] In the network of resisters, conducting meetings and moving around the city was a male-only activity. Bözsi was a resister with her weapon—a typewriter.

The interview also gives an insight into the burden of hiding very small children, one of whom could already speak. While hiding, they were taken to an apartment that Bözsi did not feel was safe enough. So, risking her life, she went down to the street and called her husband to come and get them. Laci promises to come, but his wife insists that they must conspire and that the owner of the flat must not know that he is Bözsi's husband. In the interview, Bözsi recalls this situation where she asked her two-and-a-half-year-old son to show no sign of recognizing his father:

> And I told Péterke [the son], *Apu* [Daddy] (ph) will come but you must not make any sound. You cannot cry and you cannot speak. Please do not cry, do not speak. We will come back to our home. . . if you will not make any sound. *Apu* will be here but you will not cry and will not say any word. So, my husband arrived. He was a good-looking Christian person and I said, I am happy to see you, and he said OK, I have heard about you and I have a place for you, a ticket, and take your children and. . . I have a little flat for you. And we escaped from this house. Then on the street I

> told my husband that I am not interested in what will happen tomorrow. Maybe we will all die, the family. [But] I must go home.

Bözsi's narrative is interwoven with the story of her husband, Laci. She describes precisely and without any pathos who her husband was in contact with, and how the rescue of people took place on a daily basis. As they lived through these times together, the story became organic and Bözsi's own story. All of this is evidenced by the interviewer and in many cases punctuates Eugénia's narrative. Unfortunately, the interview was conducted in a foreign language, which may have made it even more difficult to recall traumatic memories.

The interview shows a particular dynamic. For the first two hours, Linda Kuzmack listened with great patience to Bözsi, who recounted the events of the war period almost without interruption. However, when it came to the events at 90 Dob Street, the interview became disjointed, and Kuzmack interrupted Bözsi's narration several times. At first, she only failed to understand where Bözsi was during this period, and where and how she made the Schutzpasses. When it came to Farkas and the joint resistance activities, Kuzmack said she did not understand the story. A few minutes later she almost forced Bözsi to recall the story accurately. After that, the questions for clarification multiplied. When it went on to Perlasca, the interview took on a bit lecturing tone: "We need, for this interview, to talk only about what you knew at the time. Not what. . ." And the last quarter of an hour seemed to be very urgent: "Could you tell us what happened next? We need to move a little bit." The interviewer repeatedly cut into Bözsi's words. "Excuse me. I need to. . . we need to stay with what happened during the war. Can you just tell us briefly what your husband did in Israel, and then we need to go back and finish the story."

Presumably Kuzmack was also exhausted in the interview, because before the end of the third tape she said: "We have two minutes left on this tape. Uh it is very late. Uh I want to ask you if you want to just. . . we can change tapes and go do a short, another half hour and finish up. Would you like to do that?"

This is not an exceptional case. Interviewing Holocaust survivors is a challenging task, a labor, a vocation. We have also conducted dozens of interviews where similar "errors" can be found. However, we as Holocaust scholars must also analyze these "errors." Over the past decades, several books have been written critically analyzing interviews. Others have also observed that witnesses were dissatisfied with the interview situation or with the narrative that was created during the interview. Many of them therefore tried to tell their life stories again and again. Other scholars have also observed that during the interview process, there is a great deal of

pressure on survivors to align their own life stories with the dominant Holocaust narrative.[58] This may have been the case for Bözsi. She came to the interview with a strong agenda: she wanted to tell her husband's story to get some satisfaction. Kuzmack, on the other hand, probably wanted to focus the interview on the stories Bözsi had personally experienced with Perlasca. Bözsi had never met Perlasca, so Szamosi's story was probably not relevant to Kuzmack.

We know from the family correspondence that Bözsi was not entirely satisfied with either the interview or the narrative created by the USHMM about László Szamosi. Nevertheless, she wrote a letter to Linda Kuzmack thanking her for patiently listening. However, in this letter she also noted that Perlasca's role had not been clarified, and she attached some questions. She also subtly mentioned that she found it difficult to speak English, and that her greatest wish was to tell her life story in Hungarian to a Holocaust museum in Hungary.[59] Despite all these difficulties, the interview helps us to understand László Szamosi's diary and the motivations behind his life saving activities.

In 1990, Eugenia Szamosi donated to the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, the typewriter that had accompanied her throughout her life. Many of the documents in the book were produced on this typewriter well after Budapest. It served as the family Hungarian typewriter for Laci's correspondence with Yad Vashem, his lectures on Komoly and Wallenberg, and his organization of the First World Congress of Hungarian Jews. It was the same typewriter that Eugenia used in her fight during the Perlasca years and for her devoted letters to her daughter, Miriam. A photograph of it is in this book at Figure 0.2. The survival of the typewriter is a miracle in itself, but its significance goes beyond its materiality. By placing the typewriter in a museum, the family has also symbolically closed the story: the typewriter, along with the documents it produced, belong in a museum to help future historical researchers. This act brought the family to a crucial stage in a long commemorative work.

> This is the very same typewriter which I, Eugenia Szamosi, used in October, November, and December of 1944 in the children's home on 90 Dob Street in Budapest, Hungary . . . I also used the typewriter to write Schutzpasses . . . With this typewriter we made lists of names of people who were deported on the infamous death march to the Austrian border . . . In April of 1945, after the Russian army had liberated the city in January, László Szamosi, my husband, dictated his memoirs to me, which I typed directly on this machine. I typed the 28-page memoir of that paper we could find. It was written in Hungarian. . . . When I left Hungary in 1949, and emigrated to Israel, I took this typewriter with me. I used

> it continuously until 1990 when I gave it to the Holocaust Museum in Washington. It is full of dust and history.[60]

In the museum, she sat at the typewriter one last time and typed on a piece of paper: "Good-by [*sic*] my old friend. For a lifetime you were my best friend."[61]

*

The year 1990, however, was not only the year of the USHMM interview and the handing over of the typewriter to the USHMM. It was also the time when Eugenia Szamosi prepared a humorous text for the family, which reveals another very strong motivation for the long memory work: namely, that she felt that traces of her husband's sacrificial work were slowly disappearing from the remembrance of the Hungarian Holocaust. And while the co-protagonists (Sanz-Briz and Perlasca) who were declared Righteous by Yad Vashem were becoming more and more heroes in the public space, her husband was fading from the public memory. "The World-Famous 'Perlasca Circus'" tells this story in an ironic way, "for internal use." We publish it now because, on the one hand, it would be difficult to understand the dynamics of this long memory work within the family without it and, on the other, because we believe that it can shed light on the paradox between the historical and social perceptions of Jewish and non-Jewish rescuers. In this text, let us not look for some sober summary: the "demonization" of Perlasca is a stylistic element of the text and its primary function is to create family cohesion. The family members, meanwhile, were clearly aware that the reality was much more complex than that.

Eugénia Szamosi exchanged several letters with the USHMM historian Sybil Halpern Milton (1941–2000)[62] about the story of the typewriter and the other documents she delivered to the USHMM. In a letter dated 8 October, Bözsi desperately tells her children about the relationship with the USHMM:

> Sybill [*sic*] is very smart, but even to her I will not permit wrapping the history. She thinks that the more often she writes down the name of László Szamosi, the more satisfied I'll get. To the contrary! I will not permit any description subject to potential misunderstanding, for that would end my security of knowing that I present only the clear reality, without any fables or exaggeration. I will not permit that Ottó Komoly should be made into a partner of Szamosi, for Ottó Komoly's entire life was dedicated to the common good, and he had organized the children's homes for long before—later, when we got into one of them (90 Dob Street), then Szamosi joined the work. If she mixes it up completely, to the effect that Szamosi had established children's homes, also that he

> worked with Miklós Krausz, Charles [*sic*] Lutz, Wallenberg, etc., then she might as well leave the "Spanish rescue" to poor Perlasca. What he (Szamosi) had NOT done, he should not be mixed into—but they give credit to those things which he had INDEED done . . . This is just like that "combination of events" that was offered to me by Sari Reuveni—very kindly—which made me so very angry.[63]

The family made several appeals to various newspapers and international Jewish organizations to assert Bözsi's rights.[64] Bözsi was interviewed, and her story became known to the public. Like her husband, Eugenia worked on properly conveying the events of 1944–45 up until two years before she died. She passed away in 1992. Since then, her work has been taken up by her daughter Miriam, son-in-law Jeffrey, nephew Andrew Sanders, and more recently, grandson, Asa.

The Eger's Story

On 13 October 1998, Temple Emanu-El, the largest synagogue in New York, hosted a panel discussion for their congregation in praise of the recently published book on Perlasca, *The Banality of Goodness* by Enrico Deaglio.[65] Miriam, Jeffrey, and their son Asa, who had just graduated college several months earlier, attended. The event was also sponsored by the Braun Holocaust Institute, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Columbus Citizens Foundation. On the panel were a number of Holocaust scholars, including Dr. Eva Fogelman, Dr. Susan Zuccotti, Dr. Andrea Bartoli, as well as the author Deaglio. The talk left out any mention of László and Eugenia Szamosi, and when, during the Q and A, Jeffrey raised the question of how the panelists reckon with the reality of their involvement, and challenged the narrative of Perlasca as a lone-hero, the audience and panel broke out in consternated surprise; the moderator abruptly ended the entire program, and the panelists were not allowed to respond. The events of the evening inspired Asa Eger to take up the fight for historical accuracy and, with Jeffrey, he wrote letters to all who attended and to a second group of scholars, mostly from Yale,[66] who would attend a subsequent panel discussion event two evenings later at Yale University. The faxed letters were meant as an intervention one day before the event, to make them aware of the material that was at Yad Vashem, Bözsi's oral history testimony at USHMM, and all the news articles mentioning Szamosi. They also enclosed the chapter on Szamosi by Bierman, and the *Canadian Jewish News* and *Algemeen Dagblad* articles on the interview with Bözsi. Asa and Jeffrey asked these scholars to consider an alternate or more nuanced and balanced version of the story of group resistance in 1944/1945 Budapest. In addition, Asa and Jeffrey wrote letters to Dr. Mark Weisstuch, the vice-

president of Emanu-El, and Dr. Ronald Sobel, their senior rabbi. None of these scholars responded. After a follow-up email to Yale professors Mazzotta and Blackwood in which Asa asked how the Yale panel had gone, Mazzotta replied:

> Dear Mr. Eger, I am not the person who can best inform you about the events last Thursday at the Joseph Slifka Center. We did discuss the text about Perlasca. And I did read parts of the letter you had sent me as well as, as it turned out, others. The reaction from some of the panelists was one of anger. I left quickly and do not know what else they said. But in their remarks, they just dismissed your note and re-stated the fact that they had mentioned Szamosi in their book.[67]

However, *The Banality of Goodness* had not mentioned Szamosi. Blackwood responded to the email prompt, writing:

> Dear Mr. Eger. The professor from the Italian department did read your letter, so you might want to contact him. I agree w/you that there are some important issues here worth discussing, tho' this is a very *tricky* proposition these days, since the "story" per se has priority. And if one operates under this assumption, then the actual details are less important. As an historian, I do find this problematic (witness the whole Goldhagen phenomenon)—all the more so since, for example, the very rich history of Magyar Jewry all too easily gets ignored, if not distorted.[68]

The events surrounding Deaglio's book resulted in Asa joining the efforts of setting the historical record straight while memorializing his grandparents. This volume is the product of those efforts.

In 2013, Miriam Eger also tried to engage the USHMM to take up the Szamosi material—to research and represent it properly. Similar to the response sent to her mother, the USHMM did very little but point her to David Gur,[69] head of an Israeli society, The Society for the Research of the History of the Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary, and Chana Arnon, one of the leaders of the Jews Rescuing Jews Committee. Miriam went to Israel to meet with David Gur, and upon asking him why her father had been overlooked in all of these events by institutions, his response was that because Szamosi never belonged to any formal entity (like a neutral nation legation or a Zionist organization), and because he worked solo, he was never strongly considered as a key player. The USHMM however, after having their senior historian Peter Black review the archival materials Miriam had sent, did acknowledge Szamosi's role, albeit nominally:

> I am very glad that you brought this to our attention so that we can correct the historic record here. As a result, we have edited our captions in

> the photo archives for any photos dealing with Perlasca to mention the significant role your parents played in this rescue. We are also editing our website to give credit to your parents wherever Perlasca's name appears.[70]

Miriam asked if any further steps could be taken but did not receive a response.

At the same time, Miriam became aware of the Spanish journalist Arcadi Espada who had just authored a book on the role of Ángel Sanz-Briz and questioned the role of the hero status given to Sanz-Briz and Perlasca.[71] Espada was not aware of Szamosi's activities and was greatly interested in revising his book to include them. Miriam shared the Szamosi archive (of which she was now the family keeper, following her mother's death), and Espada researched and incorporated the material in the second edition of his book, this time translated and published in Italian in 2015.[72] She asked if the USHMM would publish it in English, but they instead directed her to other presses.

In conjunction with the revived quest on the Szamosi's story and renewed hope in Espada's book, Asa went over the primary source accounts—Laci's memoir, Eugenia's oral history, Perlasca's oral history, and Perlasca's diary—and set to the task of creating a careful timeline of events showing points of corroboration and divergence. Peter Sherwood, professor emeritus of Hungarian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, generously translated the memoir to English anew in 2014. In the inertia presented by various institutions and scholars, Asa decided to go ahead and publish the memoir of Laci and any other elements of the Szamosi archive asking us to join the project so that the story of the Szamosis would not turn into yet another hero's narrative, but would be properly framed within the main arguments that the saving of Jews in Budapest was only accomplished through a network of resistance rather than single heroes, and that this network could not have been effective without the help of Jewish resisters.

The Paradox of Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust

There are many and very complex reasons why the efforts of Jews who were very active in Jewish rescue during the war were no longer in the spotlight after it ended. In this introduction to the volume, we would like to unravel just one very important aspect. After the war, knowing that the Holocaust had claimed a total of six million victims, most of the survivors themselves did not consider it to report their successful rescue efforts to the wider public. The Jewish "self-rescuers" preferred to remain silent or to speak only very quietly.[73] The Szamosi family settled in Israel after the war, and

in 1958, László Szamosi's memoirs and original documents were donated to Yad Vashem. In doing so, the family believed they had added their own story to the national narrative of Israel.

Since 1963, the State of Israel has honored the actions of non-Jews who actively helped persecuted Jews during the Holocaust years, at their own personal risk, with the "Righteous among the Nations" award, which is presented to the recipients by Yad Vashem. The award is defined as one that "represents a unique and unprecedented attempt by the victims to honor individuals from within the nations of perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders, who stood by the victims' side and acted in stark contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility that prevailed in the darkest time of history."[74] Several factors must be mentioned. Firstly, by its very nature, it was awarded to non-Jewish rescuers. Secondly, the medal can only be awarded to individuals, so it mostly portrays individuals as "lonely heroes" who, in fact, often worked in teams along with Jewish resistance fighters to save other Jews.[75] Thirdly, the media, the film and book industries, have exaggerated the stories of some of the rescuers, making them sensational, even attributing to them acts in which they may have been only minor players. This was particularly true in the case of Perlasca, who himself was a refugee in the winter of 1944/45.

By the end of 2022, more than twenty-eight thousand people had received the award. Many of them are individuals and families who personally helped persecuted Jews during the Holocaust. In many cases, they knew those who had been hidden, fed, or otherwise cared for before the war. But there were also some who saved lives as part of a network, working with Jewish "self-rescuers." These networks mostly saved people whom the non-Jewish rescuers did not know personally.[76] Among them were diplomats working in Hungary in 1944–45, who used letters of protection to save the lives of thousands of people unknown to them.

However, the "Righteous among the Nations" award, by its individual nature, makes it impossible to show the cooperation of Jewish rescue networks, in this case the cooperation of Jews and non-Jews. The individual narrative, told in terms of the leading role of the honored Righteous, inevitably distorts the role of the other members of the network. This is particularly true in cases where the bulk of the network was made up of persecuted Jews.

In recent years, more and more researchers have been studying the history of Jewish self-rescue during the war.[77] Even Mordecai Paldiel, who was the head of Yad Vashem's Righteous among the Nations department at the time of the "Circus" (Perlasca's rise, see Chapter 15) and unwilling to consider Bözsi's request to review the Szamosi's role more deeply, rethought the importance of Jewish self-rescue. While he had previously

been rigidly opposed to Jewish self-rescuers receiving any public recognition (see Document 14.7), he has recently and spectacularly changed his position on the issue. In a conference volume he co-edited, published in 2021, he writes:

> It took many years for Jewish institutions dedicated to Holocaust remembrance to highlight the role of Jewish rescuers of fellow Jews. The standard response often advanced was that a Jew helping a fellow Jew was merely doing what he or she was obligated to do; hence, there was nothing remarkable in such a type of behavior. By contrast, gentiles helping Jews were acting in ways not consistent with normative human behavior, especially in light of the personal risks to themselves, and therefore merited special recognition. There was, however, something intellectually absurd in such an argument. As noted by Marion Pritchard-van Binsbergen, a celebrated non-Jewish rescuer in the Netherlands, and recipient of Yad Vashem's Righteous title, who, in a private communication to me in 1997, wrote: "Not recognizing the moral courage, the heroism of the Jewish rescuers, who if caught were at much higher risk of the most punitive measures than the gentiles, is a distortion of history."[78]

László Szamosi's austere and terse memoir of the last three months of 1944 and the first weeks of 1945, which was almost exclusively factual, did not end there. As we have seen above, Szamosi himself continued to work on his memoirs shortly before his death, making them available in English and Hebrew. This long and often painful "memory labor" for the survivors of the Shoah was made particularly difficult by the fact that the family felt, especially after the death of László Szamosi, that the brave deeds, sacrifices, and heroic struggles of Szamosi and his fellow Jewish resistance fighters in 1944–45 were gradually being overshadowed by the non-Jewish helpers. Many Jewish survivors were particularly pained that this trend, which had been observed globally from the late 1980s, was one of the unintended consequences of the Righteous among the Nations Award established by the State of Israel.

This volume does not seek to do justice retrospectively, as that would not have been possible. Rather, it seeks to bring to the fore those connections and hidden contexts that have been less visible until now. Firstly, the memory work does not end when a memoir is finished—on the contrary, it only begins with it. László Szamosi reached back over decades in his memoirs to recall the memories of his contemporaries: from Ottó Komoly to Raoul Wallenberg. But we can also follow how the memoir becomes part of the family memory, and how Bözsi, and with her the whole family, took over the memorial work after her husband's death. Secondly, the book gives an insight into the institutional constraints that prevented this family

memory from coming to rest, even in the case of the two world-famous Holocaust museums, Yad Vashem and the USHMM. And ultimately, we also see that the stories, initially intertwined, have over time taken parallel paths: and while their inner core has not changed a lot, they have reopened old wounds in the particular space of media and memory politics, which inevitably change events and emphases. In this sense, the book is unique because it not only puts the memoir of 1944–45 in the hands of the reader, but also gives an insight into its long and sometimes painful afterlife.

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Notes

1. On the Arrow Cross and German raid, see: Pető, *Women of the Arrow Cross Party*.
2. See quotes from the report: "Nyilas terror Budapesten 1944–1945", retrieved 19 Feb. 2023 from http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=328:etnikai-konfliktusok-erdely-1918-1919&catid=39:dka-hatter&Itemid=203.
3. Ibid.
4. On the siege, see Ungváry, *Siege of Budapest*.
5. For details on the Israeli state's "Righteous Among the Nations" award and the recipients, see: https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html (retrieved 20 Jan. 2023). For a

selection of contemporary documents demonstrating the diplomats' activities to save Jews, see: Karsai and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*.

6. Retrieved 20 Jan. 2023 from https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=Per percent20Anger&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4013709&ind=0.
7. On Born, see: Wagner, "The Red Cross Official Who Knew No Fear."
8. Tschuy, *Dangerous Diplomacy*.
9. Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*; Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg*; Schult, *A Hero's Many Faces*.
10. For the story of the home-school teacher, see: Reuveni, "A nem diplomatikus diplomaták."
11. On the joint actions of diplomats and Zionist resisters, see, among others, Rezső Kasztner's post war report: Karsai and Molnár, *The Kasztner Report*, originally published in 1946 in German.
12. For the activities of the Spanish embassy in 1944–45, see the following bilingual volume in Spanish and Hungarian: n.a, *Ángel Sanz Briz,* retrieved 20 Jan. 2023 from https://www.exteriores.gob.es/Embajadas/budapest/es/Embajada/Documents/HomenajeSanzBriz/FOLLETO percent20SANZ percent20BRIZ percent202020.pdf.
13. Ibid., 23.
14. See Karsai and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*, document no. 232.
15. Ibid., document no. 315.
16. See n.a, *Ángel Sanz Briz*, 29–32.
17. Jenő Lévai (1892–1983), was a journalist, writer, and editor. Originally an engineer, he had worked as a sports journalist before World War I. In that war, he took part in the siege of Przemyśl, among other battles, and was later taken prisoner of war by Russia. After his liberation, he became a newspaper editor and published his reports on his Russian captivity. He was deported in 1944, and after his return home he mainly wrote about the Holocaust in Hungary. See: https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/l-76823/levai-jeno-769D8/ (retrieved 20 Jan. 2023).
18. On Lévai's works see: Laczó, "The Foundational Dilemmas"; and Zombory, "A nemzeti tragédia narratívái."
19. Pro memoria Lévai Jenő úrnak, 1946 (translated from the original Italian text). See Akadémiai Levéltár (Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), VIII. Akadémiai intézetek (Academic Institutions), 224. Történettudományi Intézet (Institute of History) e Hagyatékok (Legacies)—Lévai Jenő hagyatéka (Legacy of Jenő Lévai). By a fortunate coincidence, we recently found the lurking part of the Lévai legacy in the basement of a tenement building in Budapest, and returned it to the Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
20. Letter of 18 April 1945 to Giorgio Perlasca from the residents' committee of the house at 35 Szent István Park. For a copy and a Hungarian translation of the letter, written in French, see Elek, *Az olasz Wallenberg*, 112–14.
21. For Weyermann's letter written in French and German, and a Hungarian translation of the letter, see Elek, *Az olasz Wallenberg*, 115–16.
22. Mátrai, "Hogyan mentette meg 5200 ember."
23. "Ki mentette meg a spanyol védetteket?" *Szabadság*, 21 June 1945, 5.
24. Lévai, "Védlevelek helyett."
25. n.a, *Ángel Sanz Briz*, 26.
26. See https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Komoly_Otto (retrieved 20 Jan. 2023) and https://archive.jewishagency.org/places-israel/content/26062/ (retrieved 20 Jan. 2023). See also Komoly's recently published diary: Komoly, *Orphans of the Holocaust*.
27. Salamon, *Keresztény voltam Európában* [I was a "Christian" in Europe], 184–90.

28. Lévai, *Fehér könyv* [White book].
29. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry*.
30. Kashti, *Rescue and Revolt*, 72.
31. Ibid., 122.
32. See Document 7.2, Letter from Tivadar Lázár (in Hungarian), 26 February 1958.
33. See Chapter 12.
34. "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here, have, thus far, so nobly advanced" (Abraham Lincoln: The Gettysburg Address, 1863).
35. See Chapter 12.
36. Béla Vágó (1922–2000), a historian, was between 1949 and 1957 an assistant professor at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj (Romania). He emigrated to Israel in 1957 and became a professor at the University of Haifa, where he wrote and published his works in English.
37. Bierman, *Righteous Gentile* [Chapter 9 on Szamosi].
38. Interview no. 176 (17A). Both the recordings and transcript are available on YouTube in four parts (for part one, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNQjsEsOgxg). Interviewer Robert Rozett, now chief librarian at Yad Vashem, used this oral history and others in his article "Child Rescue."
39. See Chapter 13.
40. *Raoul Wallenberg: Buried Alive* (Dutsch, d: David Harel, 1983).
41. *Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg* (Swedish: God afton, Herr Wallenberg – En Passionshistoria från verkligheten) (d: Kjell Grede, 1990, Károly Eperjes as László Szamosi).
42. Tom Kelemen, "Too Late to Say Goodbye," *Australian Jewish News*, 22 May 1986.
43. See e.g., Cohen, *The Halutz Resistance*.
44. For a reconstruction of Perlasca's "discovery," see: Elek, *Az olasz Wallenberg*, 9–56; and Deaglio, *A jótett egyszerűsége*, 25–35. A volume published in 2012 in Hungary in two languages, Hungarian and Italian, also contains several documents related to Perlasca, including his memoirs, which were rewritten in the 1950s: see Bangó and Biernaczky, *A "szélhámos"*.
45. From Perlasca's memoir of 1946, we know that Bárdos was taken away by the Arrow Cross on 6 January 1945, when he was trying to bring food to the house's inhabitants in a small handcart.
46. A Hungarian Israeli historian (1928–2022), and a member of the Hashomer Hatzair Zionist youth movement in Hungary in 1944–45. See https://multesjovo.hu/nekrolog/feldmayer-peter-reuveni-sari/ (retrieved 12 Feb. 2023).
47. Sári Reuveni's reasoning is not really understandable, as the award can also be given posthumously.
48. See https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=Perlasca&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4016851&ind=0 (retrieved 15 Feb. 2023).
49. To see how the image of the former Francoist Perlasca, who later became a real hero as a Jew rescuer, fitted into the map of the memory-political struggles in Italy and Spain, see: Rosillo and Castelli, "Ángel Sanz Briz y Giorgio Perlasca," and Emiliano Perra, "Legitimizing Fascism."
50. Elek, *Az olasz Wallenberg*, 112–14.
51. This was conveyed to Eugenia in several letters from Mordecai Paldiel, director (1984–2007) of the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.
52. See Document 14.4.

53. See Chapter 16.
54. Interview with Perlasca, RG-50.030*0178. Retrieved 15 Feb. 2023 from https://collections.ushmm.org/oh_findingaids/RG-50.030.0178_trs_en.pdf, p. 28.
55. Retrieved 15 Feb. 2023 from https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504688.
56. About the female agency, see e.g., Pécsi, *Salty Coffee*; Vasvári, "Emigrée"; Kovács and Szapor, "The Storyteller of the Shoah."
57. Perhaps it is worth pointing out a side issue here. As we have seen from what has gone before, history has often been at war with names. Perlasca mistakenly spelled Szamosi as Somogyi in his 1945 memoir, and in the USHMM interview the name was marked as unrecognizable.
58. See e.g., Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*; Matthäus, *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor;* Kangisser Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel,* Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*.
59. See Document 16.5, Letter from Bözsi to Linda Kuzmack, 14 September 1990.
60. See Document 16.9, The Typewriter, 29 September 1990.
61. Sybil Milton, "The Typewriter that Rescued Budapest Jews in 1944." Unpublished, 1990.
62. See Chu, "In Memoriam."
63. Letter to Miri and Jeff Eger, 8 October 1990 (Szamosi-Eger archives).
64. See e.g., Csillag, "Giorgio Perlasca's Role"; Gerritse, "Perlasca, een vergeten held"; Gerritse and Meiijers, "Mysterie over Redding Joden."
65. Deaglio, *The Banality of Goodness*.
66. Lee Blackwood (Yale, History), Giuseppe Mazzota (Yale, Italian Studies), Risa Sodi (Yale, Italian Studies), and Ari Gause (Yale, Hillel).
67. Document 18.4, Email to Asa Eger from Dr. Mazzotta, 19 Oct. 1998.
68. Document 18.3, Email to Asa Eger from Dr. Blackwood, 19 Oct. 1998.
69. On David Gur and his rescue activities during 1944–45 in Budapest, see: https://www.yadvashem.org/remembrance/archive/torchlighters/gur.html (retrieved 18 Feb. 2023).
70. Document 19.1, Letter of Judith Cohen to Miriam Eger, 7 May 2013 (Szamosi-Eger family archives).
71. Espada, *En nombre de Franco*.
72. Espada, *L'autentica impostura*.
73. See e.g., Virág, *Children of Social Trauma*; Erős, "Jewish Identity"; Erős, Kovács, and Vajda, "Intergenerational Responses."
74. See: https://righteous.yadvashem.org/ (retrieved 20 Jan. 2023).
75. The only exception is the Danish case: "The members of the Danish resistance viewed the rescue operation as a collective act and therefore asked Yad Vashem not to recognize resistance members individually. Yad Vashem respected their request, and consequently the number of Danish Righteous is relatively small. A tree was planted on the Mount of Remembrance to commemorate the Danish resistance." Retrieved 20 Jan. 2023 from https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics.html?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIwMX2_NOI_wIVkvpRCh1qoQBbEAAYASABEgJBxvD_BwE.
76. For the different types and categories of the Hungarian cases, see: Frojimovics and Horváth, "Who Were the Rescuers and the Jews They Saved?"
77. See, for example, the following studies: Gutterman, "Jews saving Jews"; Porat, "Rescue during the Holocaust"; and Milgram, *Jews Rescuing Jews in the Holocaust*.
78. Stoltzfus, Paldiel and Baumel-Schwartz, *Women Defying Hitler*, 151. See also Paldiel, *Saving One's Own*.

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