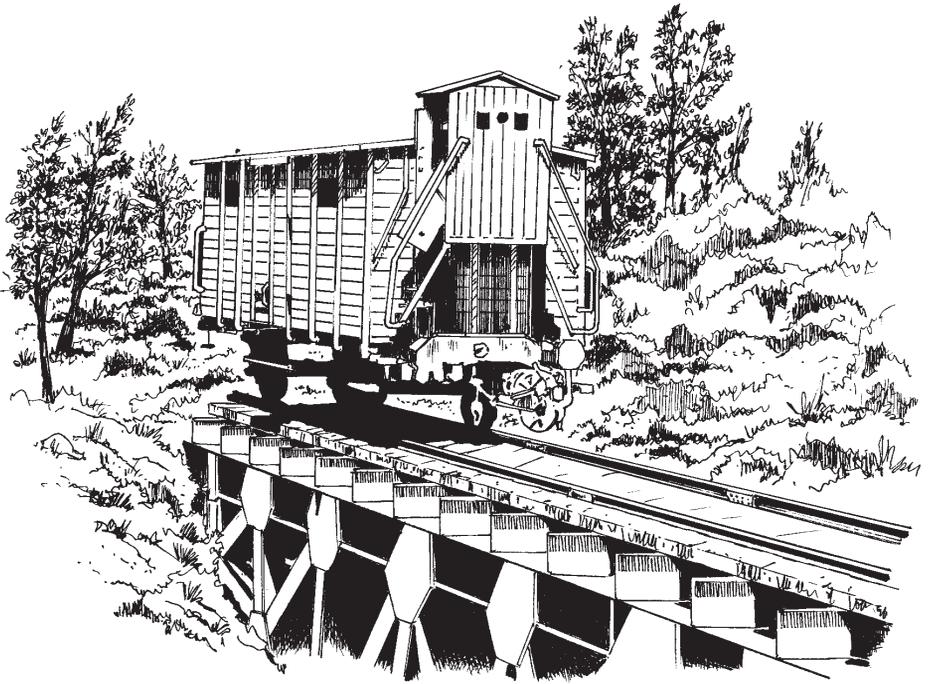


PART 1

**Yad Vashem:
The Holocaust History Museum
in Jerusalem**



CHAPTER 1

Toby Learns about “Righteous Gentiles”

The April sky was a deep blue and the sunlight bounced off the golden Dome of the Rock in the holy city of Jerusalem. Toby Belfer and her best friend, Donna Barker, awoke early in their small hotel room. “I can’t believe this is our last day in Israel,” Toby said sadly to Donna. The girls were on spring break with their fifth-grade history class from Louisiana, and they had spent a glorious week touring the Holy Land and meeting people from different cultures. Now it was almost time to return home, but first Toby and her classmates were going to pay their respects at Yad Vashem, the Museum for the Remembrance of Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes. Today was a particularly meaningful day in Israel. It was Yom Hashoah, the day of remembrance for the 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II.

As the bus wound its way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem towards the museum, a siren wailed and the bus came to a dead stop. “Every year on this day, a siren sounds at precisely ten o’clock and the entire country comes to a standstill,” said Avi, the bus driver. “Traffic stops and people get out of their cars or buses. Pedestrians stop walking and everyone observes two minutes of silence in memory of the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust,” he explained to the children. All of the children got off the bus and stood in silence for two minutes until the siren wailed again, signaling the end of the silent devotion.

Back on the bus, Avi went on, “This is a solemn day in Israel as well as in Jewish communities throughout the world. Here in Israel, all theaters are closed today, many restaurants are also closed, and no public events take place.”

The bus began its journey again. When the museum finally came into view in the western outskirts of Jerusalem, Donna exclaimed, “My goodness, what a beautiful building! It’s built into the side of a mountain.” The ridge is known as the Mount of Remembrance.

“I have never seen anything like this,” Toby said in awe. “Look how

the big skylight lets the sun shine on the different parts of the building. It's as if God is shining a holy light on the museum. How neat!"

When the class got off the bus, they first went into the Hall of Names, which contains the records of individuals who died in the Holocaust. Toby and Donna carefully studied the stories and pictures of men, women, and children who were imprisoned and killed by the Nazis in the various concentration camps. Some were Toby and Donna's age. Many were younger. Next, the class moved into the large art gallery, where they saw the lovely artwork done by the victims. There were colorful paintings of flowers and butterflies by children who had proudly signed their names. The art seemed to express hope and freedom.

After viewing the paintings, they all silently filed into the Hall of Remembrance. It was totally dark except for five candles that shone brightly in mirrors that surrounded the hall. The reflections in the mirrors made it seem as if 150,000 candles were lit, one for each child who died. An eternal flame also burned, surrounded by stones that were set into the floor and inscribed with names such as Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald, and Treblinka. Toby silently read them. "Those were some of the terrible places where the Nazis sent Jews and other people they hated," she whispered to Donna. As she continued reading the names, Toby thought about her friends and family back home and gave thanks that she lived in America, a land of freedom for all races and religions. She knew that she could worship in her synagogue, go to school, go to the library, and read whatever she wanted. She could go shopping with her friends and parents without being afraid. Yes, she was grateful to be an American and live in such a wonderful land.

Tears filled her eyes as she and the other Jewish visitors recited the *Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead. Her Christian friend Donna, along with other gentile visitors, prayed according to their own faith. Some fingered rosaries as they recited their prayers; some chanted the Lord's Prayer. Toby even heard a pastor from Georgia leading his group in the Twenty-third Psalm. There were people from different countries and religions all paying their respects to these martyrs in the Hall of Remembrance. It was a very moving moment for Toby and all the visitors.

As the class left the hall and walked back into the sunshine, everyone was deep in thought. Not a sound could be heard among

them. Toby noticed an old railroad car in the center of the memorial site. “Oh, look, Donna. This must have been one of those cars used to transport the Jews and others to the concentration camps.”

“How awful it must have been,” replied her friend. The car was an original cattle car given to Yad Vashem by the Polish government. It stands on a small slope facing the hills of Jerusalem. The car serves as a symbol of the horror of the Holocaust but also conveys hope and the gift of life.

They approached the Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations. Toby saw thousands of trees lining the pathways, each with a marker. Those trees were planted to honor the brave Christian men and women, called “Righteous Gentiles,” who risked their own lives trying to save Jews. Each tree was marked with the name of a hero who was honored by the State of Israel. There were also “walls of honor” with nearly twenty thousand names engraved on plaques. As Toby read the names on the walls, she said to Donna, “Look, there are French names, Danish and Swedish names, Dutch names, Italian names, Polish and Russian names—even German names.” There were some names Toby couldn’t pronounce, but in her heart she knew they were all heroes.

Toby and Donna returned to the avenue to read some of the markers on the trees. Toby saw one for a Franciscan monk and one for a Greek bishop. She saw the names of a Polish nun and a Protestant minister. Donna said, “Look, Toby, here is one for Pierre Marie Benoit, a Catholic priest who with the approval of the Vatican helped many victims escape to Spain and Switzerland, both friendly countries. My teacher told me about him in my Sunday-school class.”

Toby wasn’t surprised to see a tree planted in honor of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews. She knew about his bravery from her teachers. She even saw streets named after him in Israel. Then she saw Oskar Schindler’s tree. He was the brave German who hired many Jewish people to work in his factory so they wouldn’t be sent to concentration camps. He protected, as he called them, “my Jewish children.” “I saw a movie about him not long ago called *Schindler’s List*,” Toby said. “But what’s this Japanese name on a tree, Senpo Sugihara?” she asked her teacher, Mrs. Miller. “Weren’t Germany and Japan at war with America at that time?”

“This Japanese diplomat in Lithuania was a brave hero who

defied his government's orders and issued visas for Jews to head to safe countries," Mrs. Miller answered. "He saved thousands of lives."

Toby was surprised to see all these names and wanted to learn more about what those people did to be so honored. She asked Mrs. Miller if she and Donna could go back into the Hall of Names and read some of the stories of these Righteous Gentiles. "Of course," replied Mrs. Miller. "See if you can place the names with the ones you just saw on the trees or the walls and read their stories. Then we can discuss their deeds with the entire class when we return home."

Toby was eager to start this project. She and Donna returned to the Hall of Names and started to read and write down some of the stories of these brave people so others could learn the lessons of the Holocaust.