

He Saved Me

Word Count: 989

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I sighed as I walked home from school. I hated my Social Studies teacher. She was making the entire class write a six hundred word essay on a hero that we knew. I don't know any heroes, I thought miserably as I walked into my house.

"Mom?" I asked.

"Yes, Michael?"

"Do you know a hero? Who did something amazing? Anyone at all?"

She walked out of the kitchen, a warm smile on her face. "A hero? Why yes dear, I think I know one."

Years ago, there was a terrible time. A wretched man named Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. The Germans had lost the Great War, and Hitler was convinced Jews were to blame. I was young at the time and did not know what was happening. At first, not much seemed to be different. A few minor prohibitions was all.

Then, things started changing. Suddenly, I had to wear clothes that bore the Star of David. I could not go to school. Jewish families seemed segregated. I tried to stay bright, thinking it could not get much worse. I was deadly wrong.

It started when the soldiers knocked on my family's door. They were Nationalist Social German Workers, Nazis. They said we were being moved temporarily to an apartment on the edge of town with other Jews. Only my parents called it a ghetto.

It was an extremely cramped area. We had to share the apartment with another family, making it even harder to get around. The area was filled with these "ghettos", and each contained

## He Saved Me

two or more families like mine. It was terrible living there. The whole place was barren, and had the musty odor of decay about it. We were given meager amounts of food. The entire floor had to share one bathroom. It was more like a prison than an apartment.

One day, the Nazi soldiers came to our apartment. They told us to follow them. Some thirty Jews, including my family, were taken outside the ghetto. They forced us to dig a huge hole. I had no idea why they were making us do such a pointless activity. I thought it might be for exercise.

Once we finished digging the hole to their liking, we were told to stand around the edge. I did not understand this. Why were these soldiers making us do such a thing? Then, I noticed movement about us. Soldiers were slowly forming a ring around us. I noticed several of them were holding guns!

“Warten!”

I looked up, surprised at how the German word for “Wait!” pierced the silence that had descended. A Nazi soldier was running up to the circle of Nazis around us. He was carrying several papers.

The Nazi said he needed the experienced Jews from this group to carry out his job of running an efficient vehicle repair operation for the Nazis. I saw the leader of the Nazis surrounding us give the newcomer a look, but after a second he nodded.

The man walked around the circle of Jews, occasionally pulling people out, people, who I guessed, were “the experienced ones”. I had no knowledge of vehicle repair, so my thoughts

## He Saved Me

returned to what would become of the rest of us.

Then the Nazi stopped in front of me. To my amazement, he pulled me out of line. I was about to protest how I knew nothing about vehicles, when the man leaned forward and whispered into my ear

“Stille. Ich bin hier, um euch zu retten.” Silence. I am here to save you.

Silently, I followed the line of Jews he had picked. I heard a man in front of me mutter about not knowing anything about cars. What was going on?

As we continued toward a truck that would transport us to who knows where, I heard it. Gunshots. I whirled around and watched in horror as the Jews who remained circling the hole fell into it, shot by the Nazi soldiers.

I almost ran to the hole in my sorrow. But a hand on my shoulder stopped me. The Nazi was giving me a pleading look. “Bitte nicht.” Please do not. I was surprised by his care. After all the mistreatment from the Nazis and just seeing what they planned to do to us, I did not think they were capable of compassion. I realized now what this man had done. He had saved the innocent lives of a few Jews, including me.

“His name was Major Karl Plagge,” said my mother, “And he was a great man. He risked everything, lying about 'experienced Jews' to save them from unspeakable horrors. He saved over one thousand Jews by hiring them to his repair unit, including your father and me.”

I stared at her in awe. I never knew my mother had...well, I knew I was Jewish, and I had

## He Saved Me

learned about the Nazis at school, but I never knew my own parents had nearly died in the Holocaust! When we went over the Holocaust in school, my teacher described all Nazis as scum with no hearts nor souls. I knew now that was not true.

My mother smiled again. “Is that enough to help you write your paper, Michael Good?” she asked. I nodded.

While this story is fiction, it is based on truth. Michael Good is a real person, his parents both survived the Holocaust, and they were both saved by Major Karl Plagge. When he was older, Good became an author and wrote “The Search for Major Plagge: The Nazi Who Saved Jews”. He also organized a campaign to have Plagge be recognized as a national hero in Israel. This met resistance, but the hundreds of actual Jews Plagge had saved came together to support the notion. In 2005, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial bestowed the title “Righteous Among Nations” on Major Karl Plagge.