

# VANCOUVER'S SCHINDLER JEWS

## GOAL

To introduce the perspective of survivors rescued by Schindler, fostering empathy for the individuals and communities lost during the Holocaust and those who survived. Students will develop an appreciation for the value of survivor testimony and artefacts in understanding the Holocaust.



Courtesy of Barry Dunner

A COUSIN OF MINE AND I WERE TOGETHER IN THE CAMP AND SHE HAD A BOYFRIEND WHO WAS WORKING IN THE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE. HE PUT HIMSELF AND MY COUSIN ON THE LIST AND ADDED MY NAME AT THE LAST MINUTE.

—ELSE (ZIMMERSPITZ) DUNNER, VANCOUVER SCHINDLER SURVIVOR

## LEARNING FROM SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

In small groups, read Schindler Jews: Student Reading (p. 15) and one of the survivors included in Vancouver's Schindler Jews: Student Reading (p. 16-17).

Discuss:

- » How are the two readings different?
- » What is the value of each source?
- » What are the limitations of each source?
- » What do you learn from reading the survivor testimony that could not be found in a history textbook?
- » Now that each of these survivors has passed away, what additional significance do their testimonies have?

## NOMINATE SCHINDLER AS A RESCUER

The title Righteous Among the Nations is awarded to non-Jews who saved Jews from Nazi persecution at the risk of their own lives. This award is given by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Israel. Oskar Schindler received the honorary title of Righteous Among the Nations in 1962.

Students select one survivor from the readings and write a letter from their point of view to Yad Vashem nominating Schindler for the award. To support the nomination, the letter should be: 1. historically accurate; 2. persuasive; 3. describe the risks taken and 4. provide evidence from the survivor's story.

## ARTEFACTS TELL A STORY

Work with either Else (Zimmerspitz) Dunner's Auschwitz Number (p. 18) or Hidden Photographs (p. 19). Examine the image only and respond to the following questions:

- » *Describe:* Closely examine the artefact. Write down your first thought, feeling or response to the artefact. If you are working in a group compare your responses.
- » *Question:* List all the questions that you have about the artefact. If working in a group, share your questions and make a combined list of questions.
- » *Predict:* Who do you think made the artefact, owned it and used it? When and where do you think it was used? What do you think its purpose might have been? Summarize your ideas about the object.

Students read the the text accompanying the artefact and respond to the following questions:

- » *Analyze:* What have you learned about the artefact? Who used it, when, where, how and for what purpose? How important do you think this artefact was to the survivor who owned it? What special meaning do you think it might have for that person? Compare what you now know about the artefact with your initial ideas and predictions.
- » *Research:* Make a list of any questions that have not yet been answered. Research these questions and present your findings to the group.

## RESPONSE JOURNAL A

Write a response journal about the story about Else's hidden photographs. Consider questions such as:

- » Think about what you would do if you learned that you had 24 hours to leave your house, perhaps never to return. What would you take with you? What would you hide for posterity? Why?
- » Can Kempler's act of hiding Else's photographs be thought of as an act of resistance against Nazi efforts to destroy European Jews? Explain your response.

## RESPONSE JOURNAL B

At the end of the war, the *Schindlerjuden* gave Schindler a ring inscribed with a verse from the Talmud (the source of Jewish law): "He who saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world". Write a response to this statement, drawing, if possible, from what you learned in the VHEC exhibits.

## SCHINDLER JEWS: STUDENT READING

In October 1944, Schindler was granted permission to relocate his factory, no longer an enamelware factory but a munitions plant, to Brünnlitz in Czechoslovakia. Through negotiations and bribes from his war profits, he persuaded Germany military and SS officers to let him take "essential" Jewish workers with him. He prepared a list – "Schindler's list" – of more than 1,000 names of Jews, to be transferred from Plaszów to Brünnlitz.

Although the significance of being a *Schindlerjuden*, a Jew protected by Schindler, might not have been fully apparent at the time, inmates recognized that Schindler was actively protecting his workers. Prisoners tried with pleas and bribes to get their names added to the official typed orders.

En route to Brünnlitz, the women on Schindler's list were sent to Auschwitz, 30 miles west of Plaszów, to be quarantined. They anticipated a stopover of a few days. In the end, they were there for a terrifying three weeks. They were finally transferred to Brünnlitz, but only after the Jewish men on Schindler's list petitioned Schindler to intervene on their behalf.

Vancouver's Schindler Jews first encountered Schindler at the Brünnlitz factory, where they produced un-calibrated (therefore useless) shells and rocket casings as an intended act of sabotage by Schindler. Regardless of Schindler's motivations, these survivors remained understandably grateful and devoted to the man whose actions saved their lives.

Asked why he had intervened on behalf of the Jews, Schindler replied:

*The persecution of Jews in the General Government in Polish territory gradually worsened in its cruelty. In 1939 and 1940 they were forced to wear the Star of David and were herded together and confined in ghettos. In 1941 and 1942 this unadulterated sadism was fully revealed. And then a thinking man, who had overcome his inner cowardice, simply had to help. There was no other choice.*

— Oskar Schindler, 1964 interview

## VANCOUVER'S SCHINDLER JEWS: STUDENT READING



Courtesy of Barry Dunner

Else (Zimmerspitz) Dunner was an only child raised by her mother. Her father died before World War II began.



VHEC Archives, Bernard Goldberg Collection

Bernard Goldberg was the youngest in a family of two sisters and three brothers. His oldest brother Saul immigrated to Montreal and tried unsuccessfully to bring Bernard to Canada before the war broke out.

### I. ELSE (ZIMMERSPITZ) DUNNER

*I was very lucky because I got on Schindler's list at the very last minute when I was in Plaszów. A cousin of mine and I were together in the camp and she had a boyfriend who was working in the employment office. He put himself and my cousin on the list and added my name at the last minute.*

*The ammunitions factory was all fiction. We did not make one piece of ammunition. We spent our time knitting. The men who worked in the yard found wool from an old textile factory so they got the women to knit. We made socks, shirts, sweaters – everyone was knitting. We even knitted a pullover for Schindler's wife.*

*Schindler was a handsome, good man and we trusted him that he would help us survive. Schindler saw what was going on and that it was wrong. He saw what the Nazis were doing to the Jewish people and he changed. People change.*

- Else (Zimmerspitz) Dunner

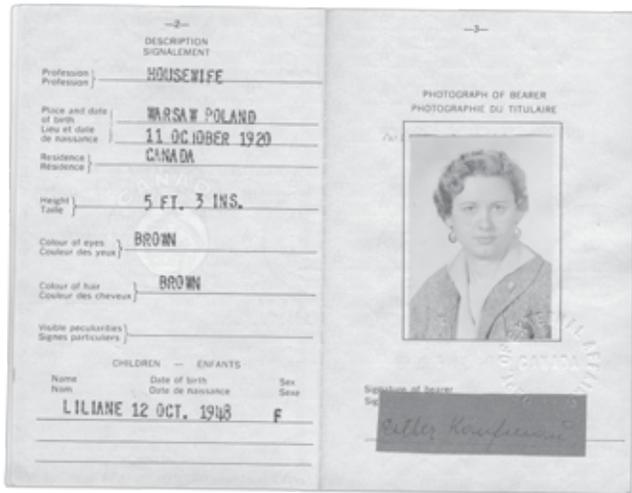
### 2. BERNARD GOLDBERG

*During the liquidation of Plaszów the ones sent to the left were sent to Auschwitz and the ones sent to the right were sent to Gross-Rosen. I was put on Schindler's list from Gross-Rosen and lucky for us we only stayed there for two weeks because a lot of people died there.*

*Schindler's factory was paradise in comparison to the hell we experienced in other camps.*

- Bernard Goldberg

Courtesy of Lyliane Thal



Esther (Zuckerman) Kaufman's Canadian passport.

Courtesy of Lyliane Thal



After meeting in Schindler's Brännlitz factory, Esther Zuckerman and Leon Kaufman were married after liberation.

### 3. ESTHER (ZUCKERMAN) KAUFMAN

*I got a job in Schindler's pots and pans factory that was outside of Plaszów. I was just lucky to get on the list because I knew the Jewish man who was writing the list.*

*When I arrived at Auschwitz in the middle of the night the lights were glaring at us and they sent the German shepherd dogs on us. I thought the world was coming to an end. While we were in Auschwitz we kept hoping that Schindler would take us out. Then came word from Schindler that the Nazis shouldn't kill us because he needed us- but Schindler didn't really need us-he just wanted to save us. It's unbelievable, I will never forget that.*

- Esther (Zuckerman) Kaufman

### 4. LEON KAUFMAN

*I was in line with a father who had been separated from his son. The father asked me to switch places with his son so that they could be together. They were sent to Buchenwald and I took his son's spot on Schindler's list. The father and son just made a choice to stay together. Now I look back at that time and can see what Schindler did but then I did not know. I just happened to get on the list. There is nothing special about me, I just remember hearing my name. I didn't know if it was a list of life or death – I just walked. What else could I do?*

*One night when they were serving the soup at the factory I met my wife [Esther], who was also on Schindler's list. Schindler found a way to get extra rations of bread for us. [Oskar Schindler's wife] Emilie negotiated with a local mill owner to get more flour for bread. Schindler would bribe the Nazi guards and those who came to inspect the factory in order to save us. Schindler did it, in part, for personal profit. He had had a nice life during the war but he also saw what the Germans were doing and he was resisting. He was always thinking of us.*

- Leon Kaufman

## ELSE (ZIMMERSPITZ) DUNNER'S AUSCHWITZ NUMBER

Upon arrival in Auschwitz, prisoners were either issued serial numbers that were sewn onto their prisoner uniforms, or they were tattooed, or both. When Else (Zimmerspitz) Dunner entered Auschwitz, she received this identification number printed onto a piece of cloth.



*What meaning and power the number – 76493 – had for my mother, Else Dunner! One might think that this number - painted in red like blood, on cloth, with the Star of David next to it – would horrify her. Interestingly, the number that was meant to degrade her, over time, became Else's badge of courage and honour. So much so, that she became proud of it and carried it with her at all times in her purse – and she always slept with her purse by her bedside. Perhaps Else felt that if she could survive the hell on earth that was Auschwitz, with that number sewn to her sleeve, she could survive anything - so long as she kept that number close at hand. Perhaps it was a reminder that better times must surely be ahead. Perhaps it was a reminder of her mother, family and friends who died in the Holocaust, and of all the other lives that were lost. Perhaps it was a reminder to always do good.*

-Barry Dunner, son of Schindler survivor Else Dunner

## ELSE (ZIMEERSPITZ) DUNNER'S HIDDEN PHOTOGRAPHS

Schindler survivor Else's son Barry Dunner tells the story of how his mother hid family photographs before being deported from Plaszów concentration camp to Auschwitz:

*In her few remaining hours in Plaszów, my mother asked a young man, Henri Kempler, to save family photos that she had kept with her. Henri promised to keep them safe and told Else that if they survived she should contact him. Several months after liberation, back in her hometown of Bielsko, Poland, my mother received a message from Henri Kempler asking her to meet him. A few weeks later Else met Henri at the concentration camp, Plaszów, where they had been inmates. They walked among the ruins, eventually coming upon the camp well. Henri jumped in and came up with the photos. He had placed them in a vessel sealed with tar.*

*The photos in the jar were accompanied by a note that read: "These photographs are the property of Else Zimmerspitz, maiden name Krieger, from Bielsko, and her husband, engineer Zimmerspitz, Karol, from Kraków. As a proof of friendship Henri Kempler hid them and included a few personal photos." The note was signed H. Kempler, Concentration Camp Kraków/Plaszów, October 27, 1944.*

*Whenever my mother spoke to students, she would tell this story as showed them these photos. They were always surprised to observe that Else had led a normal life before the war. The photos showed her hiking, skiing, and going on hayrides with friends.*

