



Rescuing the Children: A Holocaust Memoir

Vivette Samuel

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Rescuing the Children is the autobiography of an extraordinary woman, the history of a remarkable organization she worked for in World War II France, and a portrait of children in severe psychological distress.

The organization was the Œuvre de secours aux enfants (OSE, or Society for Assistance to Children), which saved thousands of Jewish children in France from deportation to Nazi extermination camps. These children were either hidden among non-Jewish families, placed in the eighteen children's homes run by the OSE, or selected to escape clandestinely to the neutral countries of Switzerland or Spain. Due to the efforts of the OSE and like-minded organizations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, about 86 percent of the Jewish children in France survived the Holocaust.

One of the outstanding representatives of the OSE was Vivette Samuel. At the age of twenty-two she accepted the position of resident social worker in the camp of Rivesaltes, set up by the Vichy government to intern foreign "undesirables." Her daunting task was to obtain the interned parents' written consent that would permanently separate them from their children so that the latter would live. In a period of six months, she was thus able to liberate nearly 400 foreign-born children from the camp. Samuel brought to this job great intelligence, linguistic fluency, and a character both deeply compassionate and steely in its resolution. She applied these qualities to the other tasks she performed for the OSE outside the camp after May 1942 and repeatedly risked arrest by the Gestapo.

Elie Wiesel and Charles B. Paul were among the children helped by the OSE. Their contributions to this book are a tribute of gratitude to Vivette Samuel and her heroic colleagues.

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