

Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld Grandfather of Thousands



The train arrived at the railroad station in London and among the many passengers who got off were a group of children. They huddled together, the older ones supervising the younger ones. None of them knew where to go and most of them were frightened. Then a tall, athletic, handsome young man with a dark beard, strode briskly toward them and introduced himself as the one who had arranged for them to come to England. He noticed a little girl crying and immediately he swung her high into the air and held her on his broad shoulders with one hand. With the other hand he gave her a candy—and all the children, even the little girl, laughed for the first time in many days.

Who was he? Who were they? What was happening?

It was 1938 and in a little over a year Hitler's Germany would invade Poland and World War II would begin. But even before the shooting began, the Jews in Germany and Austria were suffering terribly. Few people were doing anything to help them, but the young man we met at the railroad station was different. His name was Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, and even though he was only in his twenties, he was the rabbi of a shul and the principal of a day school. But even though he was a very busy man, he decided he

had to save Jewish lives. His idea was to bring as many children as he could to England.

Thanks to his great sincerity and very friendly personality, he was able to convince the British authorities to cooperate with him. He traveled to Austria and Czechoslovakia to make contacts, and soon the children began to come. Those were times when it was usually impossible for Jewish parents to leave Nazi occupied Europe, but Great Britain was willing to let their children come as students.

Rabbi Schonfeld took the responsibility of paying all their expenses as long as they were in England, even though he had no idea where he would get the money. The government complained that he could not continue to bring in children because he had no sleeping quarters for them, but that did not stop him. While his mother was away visiting relatives, he turned their home into a dormitory housing almost sixty children. Then he took the desks out of most of his classrooms and replaced them with beds. Later the government allowed him to use facilities in an English town called Shefford where hundreds of children spent the war years.

Altogether, he brought about a thousand children to England saving them from certain death. When the war was over, he traveled to Europe many times to find and bring out

Jewish children who had spent the war years living with non-Jewish families. On one of his dangerous trips to Poland, someone tried to kill him—and two of the people in his car were killed. Even that didn't stop him. He succeeded in bringing out thousands of children after the war.

He could have had many honors, but he never wanted them. Instead, he concentrated only on helping his children, supporting his yeshiva, and guiding the many synagogues that considered him their spiritual leader. A few months ago, Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld died on his seventy-second birthday. Those he saved are parents and grandparents now, but most still remember him—and he never forgot them. Several years ago, one of them, now living in America, came to England for a visit. She wanted her child to meet the man who had saved her life, so she went to Rabbi Schonfeld's home, and as soon as he saw her he greeted her by her first name, just as he had when she was a little girl in Shefford.

The present Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Sir Immanuel Jacobovitz was one of those rescued by Rabbi Schonfeld. In a radio tribute broadcast on the British Broadcasting Corporation, Rabbi Jacobovitz said that over 100,000 Jews owe their lives to Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld.

Perhaps the personal feelings of those who knew him was summed up best by one of the many mourners at his funeral, "We really are his grandchildren."



Some survivors rescued by Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld.