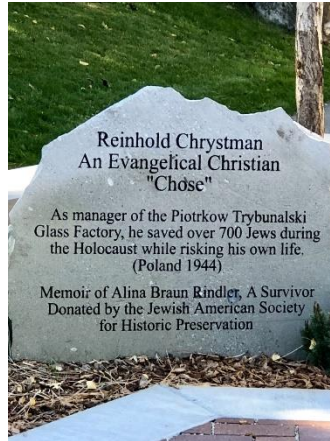


Has Yad Vashem failed?

The Search for Reinhold Chrystman

And “Choice”



By Jerry Klinger

My mother rarely spoke about the Glass Factory in Piotrków Trybunalski. She worked there with her family as slave labor. They were grateful to have the work permits. Without the cherished work permits they were useless lives to the Nazis. They would have been murdered quickly. Reinhold Chrystman was the manager of the factory.

I was young when she spoke of that time, too young to remember much and too young to want to know about things that tormented my mother. It was not until years after she past and her youngest sister sent copies of her private autobiography to family members, I realized I should have paid attention when I could.

My Aunt’s biography told how her family had been among the elites of Piotrków. They had obtained treasured work permits for Chrystman’s factory. Chrystman issued 700 permits. She said he saved their lives when he did not have to...

The Jews never understood who Chrystman was or why he did what he did. I had to know who he was and why did my Aunt honor his memory.

I uncovered two Shoah Foundation survivor interviews referencing Chrystman.

The Nazis rounded up Jews from the street. 14-year-old, Josh Segal was caught in the sweep. He was a floor sweeper, a shlepper, in Chrystman's factory. Segal was taken with hundreds of Jews to the synagogue to await execution in the nearby forests.

Chrystman learned Segal was caught. Immediately, he drove to the synagogue and demanded the Gestapo release to him one of his essential workers. The Gestapo turned Segal over to Chrystman. In the car driving back, Chrystman warned Segal, "the next time I won't be able to help you."

Segal was a useless Jewish kid. But he was Chrystman's useless Jewish kid. Chrystman did not have to. He chose to risk his life to save Segal.

In the factory, Chrystman created a shelter for the children of the elite of Piotrków. 16-year-old Jewess, Franka Berk oversaw 8 young charges. One of the useless children Chrystman protected in the children's shelter was the future Chief Rabbi of Israel, Israel Lau. I spoke with Lau about Chrystman. He had no memory of him or the shelter. He said he was only 4-5 years old. My two first cousins were in the shelter with Lau. They knew of Lau.

Chrystman could have been denounced for saving useless Jewish lives by Jews looking to curry favor with the Gestapo. He did what he did and more, just the same.

Incredulously, on Yom Kippur, he gave the Jews the day off to pray. He appeared at the service and told the Jews, not to fear. He will do what he can. He did and more, much more.

Why save useless Jewish lives?

Researching deeper into the darkness I learned Chrystman was an Evangelical Christian, a Baptist and a Polish Volksdeutsche. He never joined the Nazi party though it might have benefited him. He kept his deeply held Christian faith private, personal. The Jews never understood why he did what he did. He was just a decent goy.

I reached out to Yad Vashem to begin inquiries if Chrystman was a candidate for Righteous Among the Nations. Rabbi Lau had been the head of the Righteous Among the Nations branch at one time. A research file was opened I was told, but I had to be patient. It takes a long time to get testimony. Additional information was shared with Yad Vashem.

It has been six years, those who could give testimony have passed or their memories mercifully have died. Yad Vashem never responded about their investigation. At best they said, he was a good man...or at least not a bad man. Yad Vashem declined to even issue a letter saying that.

Tuesday, Oct. 15, in Boise, Idaho, at the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial a special event occurred. The Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial is recognized by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, as the only site of its sort in the United States. Reinhold Chrystman's family from Canada, the U.S., Brazil and the Philippines attended. I attended on behalf of my family who were saved those many years ago.

The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation had funded the placement of an honorary stone in memory of Reinhold Chrystman's "Choice". A tree was planted to live on.

The Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial is not focused on telling the story of the Holocaust in the hope that the story will be remembered. Telling the story has not worked and is working less and less as the generations pass in a world that prefers to forget the Holocaust. There is no Jewish religiously mandated fast day, or even a prayer for the Holocaust. When the sirens sound in Israel on Yom Hashoah, more and more cars race for the light before it turns red as fewer cars stop in memory.

The story of Anne Frank in Boise is presented with quotes from her, quotes from people around the world who struggle for human rights. The Memorial is in honor of (Father) Bill Wassmuth who led the fight against the Neo-Nazis in Idaho, nearly losing his life when his home was blown up.

"Saying 'yes' to human rights is the best way to say 'no' to prejudice." – Bill Wassmuth.

Has Yad Vashem failed? No more so than the traditional Holocaust Museums have and are failing. They are focused on telling the story, mistakenly believing they are shaping the future.

Has Yad Vashem failed Reinhold Chrystman. Rightfully, not everyone is a Righteous Among the Nations. Yad Vashem has failed. It has failed to teach in every situation there are little courageous acts that have and can save lives.

The Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial was proud to receive Reinhold Chrystman's story. His story is a story of *choice* in the face of darkness. They will tell his story to thousands who will tell the story to thousands.

Chrystman kept his choices between him and his God. His choices were kept quiet even from his own family.

Jen Chrystman wrote ... "Because of you, we're now inspired to look for ways to which we can save the entire world for others."

Reinhold Chrystman tried to save over 700 Jews. And for every Jew he did save, he saved an entire world.