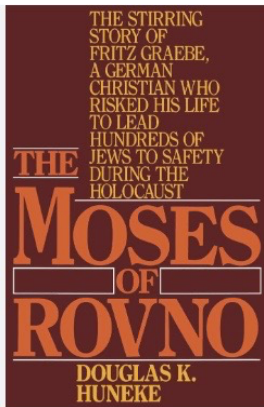


**Characteristics of People
who chose to offer refuge and rescue Jews
and other people from the Nazi's during the Holocaust**



Tom Kohler compiled this list from the book *The Moses of Rovno* by Rev. Doug Huneke and Perry Londoner. Chatham Savannah Citizen Advocacy sponsored a series of speeches and a meeting featuring Rev. Huneke in Savannah several years ago. He is a friend and ally these days.

Fritz Graebe was a German construction engineer who used his position, money, and guts to systematically create alternative identities for Jewish people throughout Germany. His work kept many people from the concentration camps. Two authors, Perry Londoner and Douglas Huneke, have studied the characteristics that Fritz Graebe and other rescuers have in common. Our conscious attention to these ten traits in our own lives would, perhaps, make us better people.

1. A spirit of adventurousness: Fritz Graebe's spirit of adventurousness was human, calculated, and purposeful. He participated in carefully planned, arduous, high-risk activities that affirmed and energized his moral beliefs and stimulated his desire to continue his altruistic enterprises.

2. Identification with a morally strong parent: Graebe's mother was his primary moral model. She held consistent, resolute views on right and wrong, and she both articulated and practiced her beliefs and values. She stressed qualities of honesty, insightfulness, empathy, assertiveness, and constructive candor; and she directed her son to make difficult decisions that would cause life to be better or easier for someone else.

3. Socially Marginal: This "difficult to measure" characteristic includes, but is not limited to, matters such as social class, political affiliation and viewpoint, educational status, religious beliefs and practices, educational status, geographic location, family type, and other personal variables. Graebe's stuttering made him socially marginal; his family was poor but respected; his mother spoke a dialect of the German language that was not common in the region where the family resided. Their association with Jews made them socially out of step with the anti-Semitic culture.

4. An empathic imagination: The essence of the empathetic imagination is the ability to place oneself in the actual situation of another person and to imagine the effect and long-term consequences of the situation of that person. There is a specific theatrical quality suggested when exchanging roles and projecting oneself into the stage of life and into the being of another character. Graebe's mother would regularly ask her son, "*What would you do?*"

5. Ability to present oneself and control a potentially critical situation: Graebe was a consummate actor, commanding nearly every scene in the dramas of rescue of the Jews. He

was intentional and purposeful in presenting himself even in roles as minor as ingratiatingly befriending a petty official or incredibly confronting Dr. Puetz in the circle of death at Rovno.

6. Previewing for a purposeful life. In order to be altruistic, a person must be both proactive and prosocial. Proactive (its opposite is reactive) and pro-social (its opposite is antisocial) behavior is characterized by: 1) careful planning to act in a cooperative and responsible way; 2) anticipating opportunities for having a positive and beneficial impact in the lives or circumstances of others; 3) actively promoting the well being of yourself and others. What is sought in this trait is the integration of a person's desire to be caring and helpful with the skills necessary to fulfill that desire. The concept of proactive, pro-social living is based on the assumption that most people would prefer to be caring and helpful rather than the opposite, and that certain skills must be learned if a person is to be predictably altruistic. The skills to live a caring and helpful life are taught, learned, rehearsed, and practiced.

7. Significant personal experience with suffering and death prior to the war. Among the rescuers, their experiences with suffering measurably enhanced their empathetic imagination. Their prior sensitivities to suffering contributed to the reality of their wartime planning and decisions to become rescuers. The ones who became rescuers had not been spared the trauma of death, injury, or separation. Instead, most reported that the traumatic impact of a particular incident was shared within the family and given perspective by parents. Because of the times, death was neither sanitized nor encapsulated in a hygienic hospital room. The experience was intensely personal.

8. Ability to confront and manage their prejudices: All of the rescuers had developed a certain world-view that enabled them to interpret the persecution of Jews and others as morally repugnant. The research has established that rescues were led by people with both short and long-term friendships or acquaintances with stereotyped individuals before the onset of oppression and by people familiar with Judaism and Jewish life. Opportunities to examine prejudices, to develop broad egalitarian and humanitarian beliefs, and to instill respect for the pluralism of the world before judgments and stereotypes become ingrained are essential if we are to forestall crises in human behavior. Friendship or familiarity with people, and cultures, traditions and structures that are not a part of our usual set of life experiences are essential. In 1979, a Louis Harris survey for the National Conference of Christians and Jews concluded that “ *the most salient idea to emerge from the study is the fact that familiarity does not breed contempt.*” To the contrary, familiarity breeds acceptance and respect.

9. Development of a community of compassion and support. Unfortunately, this was not practiced by many rescuers. The majority of rescues were isolated, secret acts of kindness. It took rescuers weeks, months, to overcome the fear that gripped them after a rescue and to regain their courage for the next rescue. They longed to share the responsibility, to increase the scope of their ministrations, to be in a mutually supportive relationship with a confidant and co-conspirator. The most acclaimed communal rescues were orchestrated by religious-based groups with a long-term and carefully organized ethics that united the people. Graebe carefully selected the most courageous, intelligent, and compassionate people to serve with him in his secret and subversive operations. Without the support and strength provided by this community of compassion, Graebe could not have been the visionary leader of a successful rescue network.

10. The ability to offer hospitality: The rescuers gave the people whom they aided food, drink, warmth, rest, protection, and other comforts. They welcomed friends and strangers alike and provided whatever was necessary to them. Most of the rescuers had an active role in a church at some time in their lives and were aware of biblical texts that refer to hospitable acts and lifestyles. The most common reference frequently quoted or paraphrased was the story of the Good Samaritan and the second most common reference was to the parable in Matthew 25 where Jesus is identified as having been treated with care and hospitality while he was imprisoned, sick, hungry, thirsty, and a stranger.

Hospitality is the training ground for altruism. Henri J. Nouwen, a Roman Catholic theologian, has written a description of the essential qualities of hospitality.

“In a world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture, and country, from their neighbors, friends and families, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear... That is our vocation, to convert the *hostis* into a *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where the brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully expressed.

Excerpts were taken from the book: The Moses of Rovno by Douglas K. Huneke, published by Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1985.