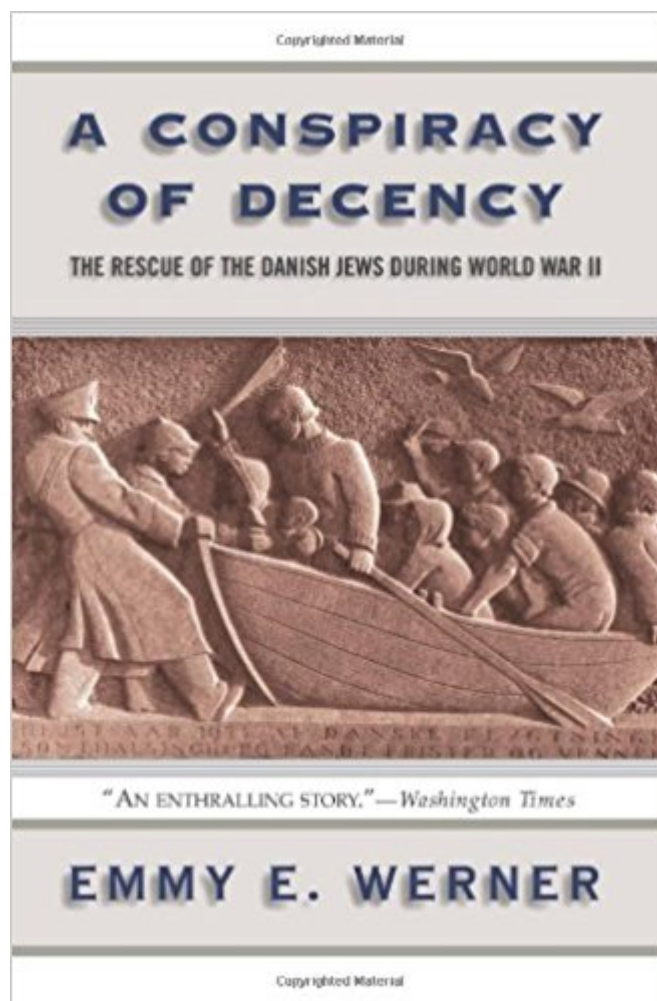


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# A Conspiracy Of Decency: The Rescue Of The Danish Jews During World War II



## Synopsis

The people of Denmark managed to save almost their country's entire Jewish population from extinction in a spontaneous act of humanity &#150; one of the most compelling stories of moral courage in the history of World War II. Drawing on many personal accounts, Emmy Werner tells the story of the rescue of the Danish Jews from the vantage-point of living eyewitnesses- the last survivors of an extraordinary conspiracy of decency that triumphed in the midst of the horrors of the Holocaust. *A Conspiracy of Decency* chronicles the acts of people of good will from several nationalities. Among them were the German Georg F. Duckwitz, who warned the Jews of their impending deportation, the Danes who hid them and ferried them across the Oresund, and the Swedes who gave them asylum. Regardless of their social class, education, and religious and political persuasion, the rescuers all shared one important characteristic: they defined their humanity by their ability to act with great compassion. These people never considered themselves heroes &#150; they simply felt that they were doing the right thing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although it doesn't bring previously undisclosed events to light, this history of the Holocaust in Denmark offers a wealth of first-person material, placed within a factually accurate, well-crafted text. The Danes gave a famously cold shoulder to the Germans when they invaded in 1940, and secretly evacuated 7,000 Danish Jews to Sweden when the Germans ordered them deported in 1943. Werner (*Reluctant Witnesses*), a developmental psychologist and research professor at University of California, Davis, uses accessible concepts (such as people of "good will") to convey what

happened, and gives careful accounts of the roles of the Danish Lutheran church, the universities and the large Copenhagen hospital Bispebjerg in speaking out against deportation, and mobilizing when it was imminent. Werner devotes a chapter to the refugees' actual passage northward, and a chapter to their reception in Sweden, where some found employment. More than 450 Jews were captured by the Germans and sent to Theresienstadt (the so-called "show place" concentration camp in Czechoslovakia); they were exempted from extermination as a result of tireless Danish lobbying. Werner includes their experiences, as well as those of Jews hidden in Denmark, and of members of the Danish resistance. She concludes by surveying various studies of rescuers and bystanders during the Holocaust, attempting to distill motivations for action or inaction. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

When the German army invaded Denmark on April 9, 1940, the Danes quickly surrendered. King Christian remained on the throne, however, and most aspects of prewar civilian life remained intact for nearly three-and-one-half years of the subsequent occupation. Then, in late September 1943, when Denmark's 6,500 Jews were threatened with deportation, Danish resistance fighters began ferrying them to Sweden, where they were given asylum. Drawing on personal and eyewitness accounts, Werner chronicles the Danes' spontaneous outpouring of support for the Jews as well as efforts by the Swedes to provide the refugees with shelter. She also describes the plight of 461 Danish Jews sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp (and later released) and the liberation of Denmark in 1945. Elegantly written and thoroughly researched, this is an important work in the field of Holocaust studies. George CohenCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I wanted to send this type of book to our nieces and nephews (all adults) as a Christmas gift because the action of many in Denmark and Sweden deserves to be remembered as does the need for such courage and decency. We have visited the Museum of the Resistance and seen a heavy full length coat riddled with bullet holes - the coat of a Resistance fighter. Not one bullet struck him as he ran. This book reveals the decency of the Danes, the Swedes and some of the Germans who "didn't see" the escapees and one who warned the Danes that the SS would start removing Jewish citizens of Denmark. His warning provided the time needed to accomplish the rescue. America lacks the record of helping refugees early in WW II. May we never face another failure such as the refusal to admit passengers on the liner, St. Louis, to disembark here even though many were refugees from Nazi terrors. The cause was the national fear of additional unemployment due to the

Depression. Yes, times here were tough but nothing compared to the horror that Europe faced. The information regarding the author's preparatory work on this book is particularly interesting as well. As a former bookstore owner I read a fascinating study by Professor Oliner (U Cal, Davis) on altruism, particularly as regarded actions in the war. It was especially interesting to see his work referenced here. What was it, indeed, that moved people to action to help others when there would be only danger to themselves in so doing? Don't miss it. *A Conspiracy of Decency* will probably make you want to Thank every Dane and Swede! Bless them!

No one could read this and not be moved by the courage of the ordinary day to day citizens of Denmark. I have visited Denmark a few times, always had a lovely holiday, but, if I ever get to go again, I will be looking through different eyes. In a small country swallowed up by the Nazis in the War, the Danish citizens displayed courage way beyond anyone would have expected. Not only that but they openly despised the occupying Troops, to the point that even the Germans developed a grudging respect for the Danes, and developed selective eyesight or turned their backs when certain things went wrong. A must read. It illustrates just what a lot of "little" people can do, if they have the courage to do so. A must read, and I know I will read it again in the future,

Finally, someone in World War 2 that retained control of their senses and didn't fall for the National Socialist lies about Jews. A very inspiring story about how Denmark reacted when the Germans announced that their friends, neighbours, and co-workers were to be rounded up and packed off to Germany. They hid them and ferried them across to neutral Sweden. The Swedes were very accommodating as well - far better in fact than the US or Canada, who summarily rejected all of the Jewish passengers on the ship *The St. Louis*. Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King on record as saying (about the Jews) "Even one is too many". This book recounts a little known part of World War 2 history. Well worth reading.

"*A Conspiracy of Decency*" tells the thrilling and all-too-little-known story of the rescue of virtually all of Denmark's Jews in late 1943. In the early years of Denmark's German occupation, Danes, including Danish Jews, were treated relatively leniently by their Nazi invaders. But in 1943, when the Danish government refused to impose the death penalty on Danish resistance fighters - whose acts of sabotage against the German military machine in their country were becoming increasingly sophisticated - the government resigned and martial law was imposed by the Germans. Soon after, the Danish resistance learned that Denmark's Jews were to be rounded up on the night of Rosh

Shoshanna in October, 1943. After an announcement by the rabbi at a prayer service at the synagogue in Copenhagen, virtually all of Denmark's Jews disappeared overnight: with the help of their Christian friends, they had gone into hiding. The stories of how individual Jews were hidden by their neighbors and eventually made their way to freedom in neutral Sweden makes for reading that is both exciting and poignant. "A Conspiracy of Decency" is a well-researched and highly readable book about an episode in history that deserves far more visibility. For an exciting account of Danish resistance actions and the rescue of Danish Jews in a fictional setting, I also highly recommend the gripping page-turner, "The Devil's Alchemists" by A.R. Homer.

It was not easy to escape death if your enemy was the Nazis. But with a small Jewish population (less than 10,000), a nation willing to risk much in order to do what was right, a nearby neutral nation (Sweden is as close as 4 km.), and Germans who would slow the death machine, a great national feat was accomplished. The story is one which is worthy of praise, and therefore should be understood in its complexity. Told in large part by those who were the saved or the saviors, this is a worthwhile lesson for us all.

This is the second book I have read about the Danish resistance during WWII, Yay Danes! I am so impressed with their humanity and generosity. It makes one wonder if such a thing could happen again in the civilized nations of today's divisive, selfish, clamoring world. (The citizens--though not necessarily the leaders--of many third world countries operate at that level routinely.)

I purchased this book in the fall of 2012. I didn't get to read it until mid-December! What a Christmas gift this has been! Thank you so much Emmy for this hard work. This work is a heartwarming breath of human courage, love and endurance. As I sit in my warm and cozy North American chair, I realized how much I have to be thankful for! It also makes me realized the power a few human beings can have when they dare stand together for what is right. It's not all happy endings, it's fascinating!

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