



Esther Posner with her mother's embroidered tablecloth that she worked on while in hiding in the Netherlands during the Holocaust. The tablecl...

Holocaust Survivor Gains Righteous Among the Nations Status for Three Rescuing Families

01/24/2019 7:00 AM / [Jackie Headapohl](#) / [No Comments](#) / [Metro Detroit, News](#)

By Louis Finkelman, Contributing Writer

Erwin and Esther Posner traveled to the Netherlands in 1976 to visit Enschede, the village where Christian families had hidden Esther (then called Marianne Rose) and her family during the Nazi occupation. There they met the heroic police officer Dick Mos, who, while officially serving the Nazi regime, secretly cooperated with local Dutch Reformed Minister Leendert Overduin to find homes to conceal 5-year-old Marianne, her parents, four of her aunts and her grandfather.

The Israeli government issues a medal for those individuals, the Righteous of the Nations, who saved Jews during the Holocaust. Each tree in a grove at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem commemorates a rescuer, who risked his or her life and the lives of their families to save Jews from murder.

Posner learned that Dick Mos and his wife, Rie, had not yet been recognized. So, she submitted the extensive paperwork describing their efforts to Yad Vashem, the world Holocaust remembrance center.

At the bar mitzvah of Aryeh, the Posners' eldest son, on Thanksgiving Day in 1977, Dick and Rie Mos came from Holland to Detroit to join the celebration. As Rie Mos remarked, "We had to save you because you are Jewish. We are glad to see you living your lives as Jews." The rescuers were surprised on that occasion to receive the medal for the Righteous of the Nations from the Israeli government.



Esther Posner and her family with members of the Spit family who hid them during the Holocaust: Anne Spit, soldier, her parents Ellen and Fritz Rose, grandfather Rudolf Rose, Spit grandmother, soldier, Tante Ulla; seated: Esther Marianne Rose and two Spit sons.

Hiding Jews in Holland took courage and ingenuity. During the Nazi occupation, each hiding place could become a dangerous trap at any moment. The Underground needed contingency plans to move concealed people again and again. During nearly two years in hiding, Marianne had stayed with five different families, sometimes with her parents, but usually separated from them. Two additional families concealed her parents and other relatives.

Three years ago, Posner discovered three of the families had never received recognition for their heroic deeds. She was determined to gain them that recognition.

After WWII, Posner's parents moved to New York. Her mother, Ellen Rose, had kept in touch with the families, exchanging letters and sending gifts to help during those years when the Dutch economy failed. Looking through her late mother's effects, Esther pulled together photographs, letters and

documents to prepare applications to Yad Vashem to gain recognition for the three families.

Ruth Joaquin of the Dutch desk of Yad Vashem replied, thanking Posner for the application, but asking, "What was the reason that this request was not made earlier, for example, with the submissions for the Mos family?"

Posner replied she had been unable to locate the families on trips to Holland in 1976 and 1992. The Tilsma family house was gone, replaced by a toy store. The Spit family, "deeply disappointed with the Dutch government's reaction to the collaborators," had moved to South Africa; Posner's parents had lost track of them, and also of the Morssink family. She hoped "I would be able to repair the error of not applying earlier."

Searching for Others

Posner could provide extensive information about the Spit and Tilsma families, who had hidden her. She did not have as much information about Fritz and Bep Morssink, who had concealed her parents.

Joaquin of Yad Vashem conducted extensive research to locate the missing families, contacting historians, examining the municipal records of Enschede and nearby Delden. She succeeded in finding an address for the Morssink children and sent them letters, but got no response, until, on Sept. 6, 2016, Joaquin received a letter from Willy Morssink, a daughter of the rescuers.

Born in 1942, she was too young to remember much of the war, but she had "heard the stories from her parents and was witness to the warm correspondence between the two families."

Posner had an unexpectedly hard time finding another family. Though they had six children, four of them boys who would retain their usual Dutch last name, the Tilsma family was hard to locate. Then she found an obituary of the father, which listed the address of one of the older boys, Meindert, in Barrie, Ontario.

She remembered him well: “He and his brother, Adry, would come home from work and school every day. They would pick me up and twirl me around and sing songs with me and play with me. I adored them.”

When she called him, he asked who was calling? She replied, “Marianne Rose.” They both laughed and cried as they shared 75 years of history. Meindert Tilsma put Posner in touch with his little sister, Femmy, with whom she had shared a room 75 years ago.

Joaquin led Posner to Dr. Evertjan Hannivoort, who researched the Enschede community, and helped her locate 21 surviving members of the rescuers’ families. They found grandchildren of the Spit family residing in South Africa, France and Florida.

In November 2017, Joaquin sent Posner the good news that all three families would receive recognition.

On May 23, 2018, Esther and Erwin Posner and their son Daniel met at the Shouwborg, the elegant theater in Amsterdam that had served as the deportation point for Amsterdam’s Jews. Right where Esther’s father had leapt from the truck, and then pulled her mother and Esther off to avoid deportation, Femmy Tilsma and relatives of Meindert Tilsma, along with members of the Morssink family, received their official recognition from the Israeli Consul of Holland and the president of Yad Vashem, Holland.

On Oct. 22, 2018, at the Holocaust Museum in Miami, Gerry Spit, accompanied by his wife, their children and grandchildren, and in the presence of the Posner family, received the honor earned by his grandparents, Anna and Anton Spit, for concealing the Rose family when the Nazis were killing Dutch Jews. Esther Posner had fulfilled her mother’s wishes.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day is Sunday, Jan. 27. For events at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, go to holocaustcenter.org/events/calendar.