

## Judy Feld Carr

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judy\\_Feld\\_Carr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judy_Feld_Carr)

**Judith Feld Carr**, [CM](#) (born 1938) is a Canadian Jewish [musician](#) and [human rights](#) activist known for secretly smuggling thousands of [Jews](#) out of [Syria](#) over a period of 28 years.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

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### Biography

Judith (Judy) Feld Carr was born in [Montreal](#), but grew up in [Sudbury, Ontario](#). She attained a Mus.Bac. in music education and a Mus.M. in musicology and music education from the [University of Toronto](#). Feld Carr taught high school music in Toronto for many years and also taught university musicology.

### Rescue of Syrian Jewry

Feld Carr used funds from the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands (established at Beth Tzedec Synagogue, Toronto in 1973), donated privately, to negotiate the release of [Syrian Jews](#) from the Syrian government. The process took over 28 years, in complete secrecy to protect the lives of those in danger. The Jews were either smuggled out of Syria, or ransomed, the majority of them emigrating to [Israel](#) or [New York](#).<sup>[3]</sup> Feld Carr described the venture: "We were buying Jews, one by one, from a hostile government. It was the best-kept secret in the Jewish world."<sup>[4]</sup>

Her work ostensibly focused on creating cells with Syrians temporarily abroad, to develop a reliable and secure information network, with coded language based **on Chinese cuisine and alcohol**. Her nickname was *Gin*, but she was also known as *Mrs. Judy*, or simply **“the woman from Canada”**.<sup>[5]</sup> Each Syrian Jew was rescued through individual bribes organized by Feld Carr. She recalled, "I bought them like you'd buy cattle...It was as crass and as disgusting a thing as anybody could have ever done."<sup>[6]</sup> In certain cases, she arranged successful escapes when bribery failed.

Feld Carr facilitated the escape of at least **3,228 Jews**, at first through her own work and later as chairwoman of the [Canadian Jewish Congress's](#) National Task Force for Syrian Jewry.<sup>[1][7]</sup>

Her story is told in [Harold Troper's](#) book, *The Ransomed of God: The Remarkable Story Of One Woman's Role in the Rescue of Syrian Jews*, republished by Lester, Mason & Begg under

the title *The Rescuer: The Amazing True Story of How One Woman Helped Save the Jews of Syria*.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Awards and recognition

Feld Carr has received numerous awards, including the [Order of Canada](#); the [Queen's Jubilee Medal](#); the Abram Sachar Medal as "Woman of the Year", [Brandeis University](#); the Saul Hayes Human Rights Award of the [Canadian Jewish Congress](#); the [Simon Wiesenthal](#) Award for Tolerance, Justice and Human Rights; and the [University of Haifa](#) Humanitarian Award of Merit. She has received [honorary degrees](#) from [Laurentian University](#) and the [Jewish Theological Seminary](#), New York.<sup>[8][1]</sup>

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/carr-judy-feld>

Judy Feld Carr

b. 1938

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“Judy Feld Carr... arose when it was ‘still night’ and woke up the world to the plight of our brethren in Syria,” announced the leaders of the Syrian-Jewish community in honoring the Canadian woman who single-handedly engineered the escape of more than 3,500 Jews from persecution in their homeland.

Institution: Judy Feld Carr

by [Harold Troper](#)

Nothing in Judy Feld Carr’s background would suggest that this Canadian woman would rescue more than three thousand five hundred Syrian Jews between 1975 and 2000. She was born in Montreal, Quebec on December 26, 1938. She and her younger brother Alexander (1942–1999) were raised in the small northern Ontario mining town of

Sudbury where Judy's Russian-born father, Jack Lev (1898–1983), was a fur trader and leader of Sudbury's tiny Jewish community. Judy's mother, Sarah (née Rivers, b. Brooklyn 1917, d. 1986), managed the family home. After Judy finished high school in 1957, she left Sudbury to study music education at the University of Toronto, where she gained both a bachelor's and master's degree in music education and musicology. She also became a specialist in instrumental and vocal music at the university's Ontario College of Education. In 1960 she married a young physician, Ronald Feld (1933–1973). They had three children: Alan Harold (b. 1961), Gary Alexander (b. 1965), and Elizabeth Frances (b. 1969).

In the late 1960s Judy and her husband were swept up in the Soviet Jewry campaign but soon refocused on the plight of Jews in Syria. Convinced that the approximately six thousand Jews of Syria needed strong western advocates, the couple organized a Syrian Jewish support committee. With a small group of Toronto activists, they publicized the desperation of Syria Jews threatened by a constant reality of extortion, imprisonment without trial and torture. Judy and her husband also sought ways to let Syrian Jews know they were not forgotten. Their committee began mailing packages of religious articles and books to Syria, items which the Syrian authorities allowed to be delivered. In the process, the Felds made covert contact with several Syrian Jewish leaders, first in Damascus and later in Aleppo. Guarded and coded communication began, as did the secret transfer of money to support individual Syrian Jews in distress.

When Ronald died suddenly in 1973, friends organized a charitable fund in his memory at Toronto's Beth Tzedec to support the Syrian work. In 1977 this work took a sharp turn. Judy, remarried to prominent Toronto lawyer and Jewish leader Donald Carr (b. 1928) and mothering a blended family with six children, was approached with the idea of bringing an elderly and sick Aleppo rabbi to Toronto for cancer treatment. The idea seemed impossible. Syrian authorities generally refused to allow the departure of Jews but Judy, intrigued by the possibility of actually removing a Jew from Syria, accepted the challenge. She quickly learned that the key to getting anything done in Syria was money. If enough money greased the right palms it was even possible to buy Jews out of Syria. With money quietly raised in Toronto for bribes and airline tickets, Judy eventually bought the rabbi out of Syria.

Before long, Judy was secretly negotiating with Syrian officials, even Syrian secret police agents, for the removal of more and more individual Jews. With every successful rescue, Judy was approached with more names of Jews desperate to leave. With each new name she began the long and sometimes cumbersome rescue process. It was not easy. Each case was unique. Since Syrians would only rarely permit an entire family to leave together, Judy bargained for each family member in turn. And costs varied; an old man generally cost less than a young and single woman, a little boy more than a little girl. How much for a pregnant woman?

In addition to the bribes, Syrians also demanded an excuse for granting Jews permission to leave. Judy was inventive. Some, like the elderly rabbi, were said to be leaving for medical treatment. Some left as caregivers for the sick, others for business

or to visit family who had left Syria in the 1940s and 1950s before Syria's doors were sealed to Jewish exit. Officially, each Jew allowed out posted money as a guarantee of his or her return to Syria but the Syrian authorities who took bribes knew full well none would return. Most of those whom Feld Carr bought out of Syria were first transported to New York where some were reunited with family. Others stayed in New York only long enough to camouflage a departure for Israel where they were quietly resettled in spite of warnings by Syrian officials that any contact with Israel would mean the punishment of family members remaining in Syria.

In some instances it was imperative that an individual or even an entire family in trouble with the authorities be removed from Syria quickly. In these cases no amount of bribe money could convince Syrian officials to issue an exit visa. As a last hope, Feld Carr entered the murky world of smuggling. At great cost and personal risk, she engaged shady individuals who, for a price, illegally smuggled people and goods across the heavily-guarded Syrian border with Turkey. Once in Turkey those whom Feld Carr paid to smuggle out were quietly moved on to Israel.

In the early 1990s hopes for a comprehensive peace, including an American-brokered peace between Israel and Syria, were high. In order to remove barriers to bilateral talks, Syria officially lifted most barriers to Jewish departures. However, officials responsible for issuing passports and exit visas still demanded a handsome fee for their services. Unsure that the Syrian door would remain open, Judy threw all her energy and financial resources into removing the remaining Jews from Syria as quickly as possible. Most left. Today there are virtually no Jews remaining in Syria.

Her work done, Feld Carr emerged from the shadows to overdue public recognition. Along with honorary degrees and accolades from Jewish and Israeli organizations, she was awarded the Order of Canada, the highest award Canada can give a citizen, in 2001. She was also honored in 1995 by Israeli Prime Minister Yizhak Rabin. "Very few people, if any," wrote Rabin, "have contributed as greatly as you have." Perhaps most important to her was an honor bestowed by Syrian Jewish leaders who recalled it was "Judy Feld Carr who arose when it was 'still night' and woke up the world to the plight of our brethren in Syria."

#### AWARDS AND HONORS

Saul Hayes Human Rights Award, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1995; Humanitarian Award of Merit, University of Haifa, 1996; Doctor of Humane Letters *honoris causa*, Laurentian University, Ontario, 2000; Medal of Valor, Simon Wiesenthal Centre, Los Angeles, 2001; Abraham Sachar Medal, Woman of the Year. Brandeis University, 2002; Doctor of Humane Letters *honoris causa*, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 2002.

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Troper, Harold. *The Ransomed of God: The Remarkable Story of One Woman's Role in the Rescue of Syrian Jews*. Toronto: 1999.

A detailed and thoroughly documented scholarly study based on primary archival

research in numerous manuscript collections and more than forty interviews with individuals directly involved with the story.

<http://www.jewishtoronto.com/page.aspx?id=52877>

Community activism on behalf of Jews in need around the world is a defining trait of Jewish Toronto. Wendy Eisen was at the forefront of the movement to free Soviet Jewry. Julia Koschitzky and Phil Granovsky assumed international leadership positions and Rabbi Gunther Plaut continues to advocate forcefully for understanding between Jews of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Then there's Judy Feld Carr, the force for freedom on behalf of Syrian Jews.

It's hard to believe that this unassuming former music teacher and grandmother of 10 was responsible for the rescue of 3,228 Jews from Syria over 28 years, in a story of international intrigue that is the stuff of legends.

To the Jewish families she rescued, she is known only as Mrs. Judy, if they know her name at all. And it was only after she secretly smuggled her last Jewish family out of Syria (they arrived in New York less than an hour before two hijacked planes flew into the World Trade Centre) that this formidable woman's story became more clear.

Born in Montreal and raised in Sudbury, Feld Carr felt the sting of anti-Semitism from a young age. "I grew up in a small town and was the only Jew in school. I was beaten up in grade two for killing Christ – they knocked out my front teeth."

It was through her Sudbury neighbour and Holocaust survivor, Sophie, that Feld Carr says she learned the horrific plight of the Jewish people. Sophie, whose two children were killed in Auschwitz and who was a victim of Dr. Joseph Mengele's horrifying experiments, inspired her.

"When I was 10 years old, Sophie told me, 'you have to do something so that this never happens again to the Jewish people.' I never forgot it," said Feld Carr. "Every time I thought about quitting, which was every second day, I'd always think of Sophie, and say, okay, I'm going back. I promised her, and I did it."

How did she enter the dangerous world of smuggling, bribery, escape routes and secret agents?

"God works in strange ways," says Feld Carr. "This isn't my background. I'm from Sudbury. How did I know how to do this? The whole thing is surreal."

It all began in 1972, when Feld Carr and her first husband, Dr. Ronald Feld, learned about the plight of 12 young Jewish men who died trying to escape from Syria.

They decided, with some friends, to take up the cause of Syrian Jewry. Through a single phone call, "the one and only phone call that was ever made to Syria from a Jewish community," notes Feld Carr, she managed to connect with Rabbi Ibrahim

Hamra, the Chief Rabbi of Syria in Damascus, and boxes of religious books began to flow from Toronto to Syria. They communicated through code in the addresses of telegrams.

Then in 1973, her husband died. Feld Carr decided to continue her work, helped by the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands, set up by the board of governors of Beth Tzedec Congregation. She mounted a human rights campaign to lobby politicians and the media. In 1977, she married Donald Carr, who also supported her efforts.

Over time, it became clear that there were people in Syria who could be bribed – that Jews could be "ransomed" out of the country. "So I started to buy people for a price," she said.

Feld Carr developed networks through which she funneled money to agents for ransom and to reliable smugglers. "This rescue was so successful because I told nobody how it was working," she said.

"The stress was terrible," she added. She traveled all over the world to undertake her secret negotiations, which were always conducted through intermediaries. "I had to live two lives – a life of international intrigue, and then I had to be a mother and do the normal things of life."

The danger was immense – both for the families she was trying to rescue, who could be killed if discovered, and for Feld Carr, who received many threats. "The fact that I'm still alive is a miracle," she said.

The work itself was, at times, distasteful. "The disgusting part was buying another human being. How do you negotiate the price of human lives? I was breaking up children from their parents. It was like the 1940s – they were desperate to get their children out," Feld Carr noted.

Many of those Feld Carr smuggled out are now living in Israel, although they can be found as far away as Mexico City and Sao Paulo, Brazil. And many have named their children after her.

She has received many awards for her heroic efforts on behalf of Syrian Jewry, but the one she holds closest to her heart is the Order of Canada. "It's amazing – I got the Order of Canada for saving Jews. That had never happened in Canadian history. Now, that's something," she said. "Everybody does things according to what they are put there for. Everyone can make a difference."

Judy Feld Carr will be the keynote speaker at a Raoul Wallenberg Day commemoration event, sponsored by The Holocaust Centre of Toronto, UJA Federation, on Saturday, January 17th at 8 pm. She will be speaking at Beth Tikvah Synagogue, 3080 Bayview Avenue, Toronto. For more information, please call 416-635-2883 ext. 153 or 301.

## Buying Lives

Judy Feld Carr's Secret Rescue of Syrian Jews

By [Miriam Metzinger](#)

For 28 years, Judy Feld Carr not only knew, but also lived, "the best-kept secret in the Jewish world." The Canadian musicologist and mother of six supported her household and raised a family **while almost single-handedly rescuing 3,228 Syrian Jews.** "There were no typical days," recalls Judy Feld Carr.

"This wasn't like the Russian exodus that was done by the world. This was me running the operation at home and in secret." While Judy Feld Carr has received many honors for her work on behalf of Syrian Jewry, including the Order of Canada (the highest award given by the citizens of Canada to an individual), the labor was not easy. "The rescue was very difficult and stressful," she said. "When you are buying somebody's life, it can be horrible."



Judy Feld Carr with Jews she helped escape from Syria.

### Syria vented its rage by burning synagogues and forbidding Jews from leaving the country

Judy Feld Carr and her late husband, Dr. Ronald Feld, developed a mutual interest in the plight of Syrian Jewry in the 1970's. An article in the *Jerusalem Post* about twelve young Jews whose bodies were mutilated when they stepped on a minefield while trying to escape from Qamishli, Syria, captured the sympathy of the couple, and they brainstormed for ways they could help Syrian Jews. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Syria vented its rage by burning synagogues and forbidding Jews from leaving the country. Restrictions reminiscent of the Nuremberg Laws which ushered in the Holocaust were passed in Syria; Jews were not allowed to travel more than three kilometers without a permit and were forced into ghettos. Business and educational opportunities for Jews were strictly limited, and those who tried to escape were often tortured or killed.

Raising awareness about Syrian Jewry was one thing, "but if you had told me in those days that I would eventually be running a rescue operation, I would have told you that you're mad," said Judy Feld Carr. She made the one and only phone call she ever placed to Syria, a call which began her 28 year journey of international intrigue. She managed to reach the home of a Jew who was in the service of the secret police and he gave them the address of Ibrahim Hamra, the Chief



Rabbi of Syria. "To this day, I cannot comprehend why we were allowed to make that first contact," she recalls. "Never again did I make another phone call."

The Feld's sent a pre-paid telegram to Rabbi Hamra and asked if he needed Hebrew books, and received a telegram a week later with a list of titles. They were careful to remove any evidence that the books were printed in Israel, and they removed the first page which contained the name of the publisher; these precautions were necessary, or the books would have been confiscated. Like the Marranos of Spain 500 years earlier, the Feld's and Rabbi Hamra communicated in code using verses of Psalms.

Judy Feld Carr was approached by a friend in Toronto who had returned from Syria and said her brother, a rabbi in Aleppo, was ill with cancer and had been tortured in prison because two of his children had escaped. She was dedicated to the task of getting her brother to Canada, and asked Judy Feld Carr if there was anything she could do. After a year and a half of negotiating prices for the prisoner and facing a myriad of obstacles, the message arrived that Rabbi Eliyahu Dahab was released from prison and sent to Canada for medical care. Judy recalls Rabbi Dahab weeping tears of joy when the nurse said "*Baruch Habah*," meaning "welcome" in Hebrew. When he was told he would only have a brief time to live, he told Judy Feld Carr of his dream to have coffee with his mother in Jerusalem one last time. He died on Tisha B'Av, a few weeks after the reunion with his mother, but not before making a dying wish that his daughter also be released from Syria.

### **All they knew was that their way out of Syria was "Mrs. Judy in Canada"**

Rabbi Dahab's words sparked a cycle of rescues that led to the creation of Judy Feld Carr's underground network, of which only she knew the details. After her young husband died of a heart attack in 1973, Judy's rescues were done solo, and the pressure was often almost unbearable. "I was going to quit almost every second day, but I couldn't, because I had figured out an underground system and I had people depending on me. And all they knew was that their way out of the country was 'Mrs. Judy in Canada.' It was hard, but I had no choice." Judy Feld Carr added, "I never contacted one Jew in Syria. They or their relatives had to find me, and that was difficult because they didn't even know my last name."

Donations for the rescue missions arrived to a synagogue in Toronto, Beth Tzedek Congregation, by word of mouth and covered the expenses of paying for the release of Syrian Jews. When ransoms could not be negotiated, escapes were planned. It is amazing that of the 3,228 individuals Judy Feld Carr helped rescue, there were no casualties. Often this required splitting up families, and parents giving up children. On one occasion she was able to rescue almost an entire family unit; Judy Feld Carr recalls delaying her father's funeral an hour because she had to plan an escape of the mother and six children. "The last day of the mourning period, I got a call – 'Judy, we have them.' It was very difficult to worry the entire week."

To thousands of Syrian Jews who reached safety, their rescuer was known simply as "Mrs. Judy from Canada," a person to whom they owed everything, but didn't expect to meet. A few, however, enjoyed the privilege. Judy Feld Carr and her husband Donald Carr attended an event in a senior home in Bat Yam, Israel. A man named Zaki Shayu spoke about his experiences as a



prisoner in Aleppo. He suffered four years of torture during which the authorities had told his mother that he died.

After the speech, Donald Carr asked him, "How did you get out?"

"There was a lady in Canada. Her name was Judy," Zaki replied.

"Do you want to meet her?"

Zaki Shayu's eyes widened in excitement. "Do you know her?" he asked.

"She's sitting right here. She's my wife."

"The whole hall got very emotional," recalls Judy. "It was the most amazing thing. Everyone was crying."

**"I put all these flags in the window in case one day she will come"**

A Toronto antiques dealer went to shop in the old section of Jaffa, Israel and saw a small shop with Canadian flags in the window. Curious, she asked the shopkeeper, "Why do you have Canadian flags here?"

"Maybe you know Mrs. Judy. She arranged my escape. I put all these flags in the window in case one day she will come into my store."

The shopkeeper's wish was granted when Judy Feld Carr visited the shop during a trip to Israel. He gave her an inlaid box which he had made for Judy and been saving for years as a present to express his gratitude.

The last rescue took place an hour before the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. A grueling, yet rewarding, 28 years of rescue missions came to a close. During those moments when the task seemed impossible, Judy remembered a neighbor from her childhood, a woman named Sophie who lost a daughter in Auschwitz. "She told me, 'You can never let this happen again to the Jewish people.' I never forgot those words."

<http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0301/rescuer.asp>

## THE RESCUER

In the early 1970s, 4,500 Jews were trapped in Syria, terrorized by Nazi-trained secret police. Then Judy Feld Carr, a music teacher from Toronto, began setting up an underground network to get them out. Today, only a few remain.

By Norman Doidge

<http://www.jewishworldreview.com> -- IN 1982, Hafez al-Assad, the Syrian dictator, put down a revolt in the city of Hama by murdering over 10,000 Syrian civilians, mostly Muslims. It was not out of character for his regime to resort to brutal violence to make a point; in the 1973 war against Israel, young Israeli soldiers caught by his troops on the Golan Heights were killed execution-style, their penises cut off and placed in their mouths. Yet, when Assad died a few months ago, President Clinton said, "I have met him many times and gotten to know him very well. . . . I always respected him." Western media ran images of Syrians wailing at their beloved leader's death-- scenes selected by Syrian state television.

But terror, not love, is the glue that ensures the Assad regime, one of the last Stalinist police states to survive the Cold War, stays in place. Syria's new president, Assad's son Bashar, is reported to have ordered the murders of hundreds of his chief rival's supporters--his chief rival being his uncle--before Assad's death.

Syria's totalitarian tragedy--the GNP is \$1,160 (U.S.) per person--has, for the last thirty years, been supported by a socialist ideology, "show trials" in which prosecutors are also judges, and state-run narcoterrorism. (An estimated one-tenth of the Syrian treasury comes from heroin, crack, and hashish profits.) Squelching dissent is the job of the dreaded secret police, the Muhabarat, which, it is alleged, was trained in the practice of torture by the most important Nazi war criminal ever to evade justice, Alois Brunner, a favorite lieutenant of the man in charge of Hitler's Final Solution, Adolf Eichmann.

Brunner's Syrian trainees long made sure the Jews were subject to constant terror. The Muhabarat's special "Jewish Section" monitored everything they did. All synagogue services had a member of the secret police present. A mark appeared (and still appears) on the identity cards of Jews, revealing the bearer to be a "Mussawi," or follower of Moses. Jews were routinely interrogated and beaten. All of their mail was opened, and the few phones permitted to Jews were tapped. Quotas prohibited advanced education, and Jews couldn't operate a business without an Arab partner. Public-school texts denied the Holocaust had occurred. (Indeed, they still do, as does Bashar Assad's new "Syria Times" Internet site.)

On top of this, emigration was forbidden. When Jews tried to flee and were caught, they were imprisoned and tortured. If they succeeded in getting out, their family members

who'd stayed behind were tortured.

Their situation seemed hopeless. Yet, in the face of this overwhelming oppression, help came from a most unlikely source: a Canadian high-school teacher, a widow and mother of three. In 1971, when Assad came to power, there were 4,500 Jews trapped in Syria. There are now about forty left. One woman got 3,218 of them out. By day she taught music in Toronto classrooms; after hours she masterminded a secret underground that reached from her Toronto home into the darkened bedrooms of Syrian generals, the windowless prisons, the pockets of border guards, and the Muhabarat itself.

A fur trader's daughter, raised in Sudbury, Ontario, she led this double life for twenty-five years. Yet few of the people she got out knew her name; she was, simply, "the woman from Canada," or "Mrs. Judy." Her real name is Judy Feld Carr. No one, except for her childhood friend Helen Cooper, who helped her, and later, the man she married, knew anything of her double life. Few knew anything at all about her remarkable story until an inspiring book about her efforts, *The Ransomed of God*, by the award-winning historian Harold Troper, was published in June, 1999. At the time, Feld Carr was still engaged in clandestine rescues, and many details had to be kept secret. Now, having completed her last rescue this March, she's able to reveal the full details of what she did, and what she experienced.

A fire is blazing. It's 1947, two years after the end of the Holocaust. Syrian rioters are setting fire to the ancient Aleppo synagogue. The United Nations has just voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, and Syrian rage is unleashed on the local Jewish population. Syrian police look on as Jews are murdered. Inside the synagogue the world's oldest known manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, the Aleppo Keter, is burning.

Forty thousand Jews flee the country. Some families have lived in Syria since 586 BCE, when they came, as they now leave, in the shadow of flames. Then they were fleeing the Babylonians, who conquered ancient Jerusalem and set the Jewish Temple aflame. Some came escaping other fires: notably, the Spanish Inquisition.

By the end of 1948 the Jews remaining in Syria are prohibited from leaving. Then the noose tightens further: they are prohibited from travelling more than three kilometres from their homes without a permit, and are confined to ghettos in three cities: Damascus, Aleppo, and Qamishli.

Ten years later, in secret, the charred fragments of the Aleppo Keter, which have been scattered and hidden, are smuggled into Turkey, then into the Jewish state. Two hundred and ninety-five pages of the original 487 are reassembled from fragments with Q-tips and saliva, a process that takes seven years.

She has Bette Midler's friendly energy and Fran Drescher-like good looks. In the seventies, I visited her Toronto home to pick up an article she'd written for a student

magazine I edited - her first on Syrian Jews. She was Judy Feld, a spirited musicologist. Just a year before, her husband, Dr. Ronald Feld, had died, leaving her a widow at thirty-three. One wouldn't have guessed she was grieving inside, she was such fun to listen to, describing her gutsy protests against Soviet human-rights violations. She had bright red-brown hair and a passionate voice that took some getting used to.

Now, twenty-seven years later, she is Judy Feld Carr, happily remarried, still a fireball, looking ten years younger than her sixty-one years. Her study is full of Damascene crafts, including a beaded heart with "Judy" woven into it that Elie Swed, a Syrian Jew she helped to escape, made to signal to her that he had been transferred from an underground torture chamber to Adra prison. There are photographs of many Syrian baby girls, all named "Judy." By coincidence, we meet the day after Assad has died and watch the news together.

"A news story is how it all began," she says. In 1971, Judy and her husband, Ronald, heard a report that Syrian border guards had watched quietly as twelve desperate young Jewish men died trying to escape the country. "They didn't know they were crossing a minefield. The Jews exploded one by one. After a generation of being forbidden to own cars and being confined to three cities, Jews knew little of the countryside, let alone borders."

The Felds wanted to help, but there were no Canadian groups advocating for Syrian Jews, a community sealed off from the rest of the world. Along with Rabbi Mitchell Serels, they went to a local synagogue and with the help of a translator, managed to get through to a Syrian operator. They simply asked for "the Jewish school." They were connected to the home of a woman who was a Muhabarat informer. She wasn't home, but her husband was, and they asked him for a Jewish name. He gave the name of the young assistant chief rabbi of Damascus, Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra. Later that day the Felds sent Rabbi Hamra a telegram and began a correspondence. They started sending religious items to Syria, figuring that even when the Muhabarat confiscated them, they'd know someone was watching out for Syrian Jews.

The Syrian Jews, using a technique developed during the Inquisition, quoted the Bible in their thank-you telegrams to convey information. For instance, shortly after the Syrians staged a bloody pogrom on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Judy received a thank-you telegram that alluded to the line from the Bible "Rachel is weeping for her children," indicating that children had been harmed. Soon, individuals, cities, countries, and fates were referred to in code.

The Felds began a human-rights campaign, informing MPs, writing letters to the editor, and holding public meetings. A Syrian military journal wrote that their campaign had to be stamped out. Ronald had a premonition something might happen to him. On June 6, 1973, a harrowing threat - the nature of which Judy will not discuss - was delivered to the Felds, and Ronald became extremely anxious. The next night, at home, while Ronald was playing a game of horsey with the couple's three-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, he slumped down. Elizabeth cried out, "Daddy, Daddy, get off me." But

Ronald was dead from a heart attack. He was forty.

"Had Ronald had a serious stress lately?" his doctor asked. Within hours of Ronald's death, Rabbi Hamra was interrogated by the Muhabarat about his ties to the Felds. Then they told him that Ronald Feld was dead - before Ronald's death had even been made public.

Four months after Ronald died, Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel on Yom Kippur and captured the Golan Heights. Now it was Rabbi Hamra's turn for deathly premonitions. With the war raging, he was summoned by the Muhabarat to a cemetery to perform a burial. When he arrived, he asked, "Who is it that I am burying?" "We don't know," was the answer. "We haven't killed them yet." The next morning, the bodies of five Israeli pilots were brought out. In a Syrian photograph, their blood can be seen seeping out of the caskets as two Syrian officials stand beside Rabbi Hamra.

Widowed, with children aged three, eight, and eleven to support, Judy juggled three part-time teaching jobs. Her synagogue set up the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands. And Judy, along with six other volunteers, started to raise money for the fund by giving synagogue speeches, beginning at her own synagogue, Beth Tzedec in Toronto. She handed out pamphlets requesting assistance. She approached relevant Canadian government agencies. In 1974, she pleaded with the External Affairs Department to meet with Syrian Jews to document their condition. Its officials refused, citing UN information that said the claim that Syrian Jews were being mistreated was "inflammatory." When she asked External Affairs to publicly support Amnesty International's bid to enter Syria, the minister sang a familiar refrain: any public statement might undermine Canada's ability to work with the Syrian government.

Meanwhile, establishment Jewish groups, such as the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), did little effective lobbying, declaring Syria the Arab state "most impervious to pressure." Some CJC members depicted Judy as a dangerous, brash amateur, whose lobbying was counterproductive.

In 1976, Donald Carr, a lawyer and one of the most respected establishment leaders of the Jewish community, himself a widower and father of three children, was sitting in Beth Tzedec synagogue. He looked over at Judy and thought, "I'm going to marry that woman." They went out on one date. The next day they were engaged, and they soon married.

## THE RESCUER, PART II

In the early 1970s, 4,500 Jews were trapped in Syria, terrorized by Nazi-trained secret police. Then Judy Feld Carr, a music teacher from Toronto, began setting up an underground network to get them out. Today, only a few remain

By Norman Doidge

<http://www.jewishworldreview.com> -- JUDY FELD CARR never dreamed of rescuing Syrian Jews herself. But shortly before marrying Don she heard that an elderly man, Toufik Srour, had become the first Syrian Jew in twenty years to leave legally. He'd had to bribe the Muhabarat with \$9,500 for a visitor's visa to the United States. From there, he hoped to come to Canada where his daughter, Esther, had lived since World War II. But before he left Syria, Esther received an emergency telegram saying, "Send me \$2,000 quickly" to expedite the visa. She sent the money. When Toufik arrived in Canada, Esther mentioned the telegram asking for \$2,000. Toufik said he hadn't sent it. Clearly, someone in the Muhabarat was testing to see if people in the West would pay bribes for Jews.

Then, by coincidence, Hannah Cohen, who ran a Toronto gas station, contacted Judy about her brother Rabbi Dahab, who lived in Syria. Some of Rabbi Dahab's children - first a son and two daughters, then a second son - had escaped. After each escape, the rabbi was imprisoned and tortured, beaten with clubs and razor-thin whips until his bones were broken and his kidneys had stopped functioning. Judy proposed trying to get him released temporarily for medical treatment. She gave speeches, raising money in five- and ten-dollar amounts, often from Jews of modest means, until she had a ransom, and could bring Dahab to Canada.

When he arrived, the internist who assessed Dahab - a doctor who had been with Canadian Forces in World War II - said he hadn't seen a body that disfigured since he'd treated Auschwitz survivors. Rabbi Dahab couldn't be saved. He begged Judy to let him die in Israel, at his children's side. Judy arranged it, and joined him there.

"Then," said Judy, "the day before he died - he begged me, 'I want you to take my daughter, Olga, out of Syria.' I had no idea how to get this girl out. . . . What do you say to that? No? I had to let him die in peace." Judy altered Dahab's documents to make the Syrians think he was alive, then asked them to release Olga to care for him in Toronto. They named a price, and with the help of Canada's new minister of immigration, Ron Atkey (who stuck his neck out and sent her a visa surreptitiously from Lebanon to Syria), Olga got out too. Mrs. Judy was in business.

She operated in secret underground cells. Sometimes three or four Syrian Jewish neighbors would be involved, gathering information, each ignorant of the others' involvement so the work couldn't be endangered if the Muhabarat seized and tortured one. In rare instances when Jewish businessmen living in Syria were permitted to travel (on the condition that family members were held back), she'd meet them clandestinely in Europe, the Middle East, and North America to set up her underground network, exchange messages, and develop codes so that when they spoke on the phone they could convey vast amounts of information. A code based on references to Chinese food was developed. Judy was known as "Gin" because, as a girl in Northern Ontario, she had consumed her share to keep warm.

Each time she saved someone, everyone involved, whether it was a low-level bureaucrat or a general or one of the highest-ranking members of the Muhabarat,

demanded bribes. Slowly she put together a picture of the Muhabarat, determining who had an expensive mistress or a second family, who needed cash quickly or was simply greedy. She bribed lawyers to let her know who was in financial trouble, and wardens to let her informants know who was in prison or had a family member before the courts. When she found out about a Muhabarat agent in need, one of her men would, on her instructions, float a proposal and negotiate prices. For women, the Syrians often bargained on the basis of looks. "A fat girl without teeth went cheap," said Judy. "A beauty was expensive."

A breach of secrecy could be catastrophic. In 1979, Batya Barakat, her husband Baruch, and their four children tried to escape without Judy's help from Qamishli with two other families. Soon after beginning their six-hour hike to the border, they ran into the Muhabarat, who had been alerted by the Barakats' Muslim neighbours. The Muhabarat opened fire on the family. Batya fell on her daughter to shield her, taking three bullets, including one in the spine that permanently paralyzed her from the waist down. She was bleeding to death, but no Muslim doctor would treat her. Finally, a Jewish physician did.

When an international campaign got Batya to Italy for treatment in exchange for a \$10,000 ransom, Baruch and the children tried to escape again. Caught once more, Baruch was tortured, along with a thirteen-year-old boy who was with them. Eventually, Judy arranged to ransom Baruch and his four children. As their plane was taxiing down the runway, the Muhabarat stopped it, boarded, and told Baruch to leave two children behind. With unspeakable anguish, he decided to leave behind his oldest daughter, seven, and his youngest, a three-year-old.

Two years later, Mrs. Judy got them out too.

Escapes were arranged when ransoms could not be. Since many smugglers secretly worked for the Muhabarat, accepting money from unsuspecting Jews and then turning them over at the border, Judy set up her own contacts in neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, she raised money and made monthly trips to Ottawa, where her member of parliament and future External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall, along with government officials Percy Sherwood, Denis Grugoire de Blois, and Michel de Salaberry helped her contact people in Syria.

One escape involved the Gindi family. Mr. and Mrs. Gindi had six sons. One boy had been beaten so badly in Syrian prison that he became an epileptic. Mr. Gindi himself was ill. After Judy ransomed the sick father and son, the Muhabarat told Mrs. Gindi that if she or her other sons tried to escape they would gouge her eyes out.

A reliable smuggler was given half a necklace. The other half had been given to Mrs. Gindi. When the smuggler came for the family and showed his half, she would know to go. In May, 1983 - on the very day Judy's father died - an informant told Judy everything was in place. Cash, in certain U.S. denominations, was required immediately. Judy raced around that morning from bank to bank to get it. "I had to put off my father's



funeral and not tell my mother about why I delayed things," she said. She gave the money to a man who took the Concord overseas. Later the same day a contact in Israel took the money to Turkey, and transferred it to someone in her underground who delivered half to the smuggler in Syria. Commissions were paid to everyone along the way.

In the middle of a moonless night, the Gindis walked to the suburbs and were picked up by a van and taken to hills near the Turkish border. They took no possessions, pictures, or money (Judy's rules). When they had crossed over, a Jewish man met them and paid the smuggler the remainder of his fee. The Gindis were then secretly taken out of Turkey. The Israeli Secret Service, initially wary of Mrs. Judy the amateur, was soon amazed by her.

Where in the world does such a woman come from?

Jack Leve, Judy's father, was a raw-fur trader. He was born in Russia. In 1904, when his brother was murdered in a pogrom, his parents, able to afford only one ticket, put nine-year-old Jack on a ship to Montreal, where he was to live with relatives. Fiercely competitive, he did far better than his classmates at Hebrew school, but one day the rabbi belittled him for showing it. Jack dipped a snowball in water to freeze it and beamed the rabbi on his walk home, knocking him out. When he was caught, rather than face the consequences, he decamped to New York and got a factory job, skinning skunks for fur coats.

After serving with the Canadian forces in World War I, Jack decided to trade furs, working in James Bay. He spent most of his time with native Canadians, befriended Grey Owl, and even bailed him out of prison once. In 1938, Jack married Sarah Rives. When Judy was born in Montreal, dog sleds were sent out to notify Jack, who was in an igloo on Baffin Island.

Eventually Jack settled in Sudbury. His company car was a canoe, and he paddled to meetings with Natives, bought and sold furs when he was not setting his own traps, hunting, or fishing. His work outfit was a parka the Natives had made him, one pair of pants, and his gun. He lived for long periods on reservations. Often he put Judy in his canoe and took her around with him. "I can remember, as a kid of about ten, watching him skin a beaver, cutting out its innards," she says. "I'd feel sick watching it, and say, 'I don't feel well.' He'd reply, 'Hmm. That must be because you're hungry.' Then he'd pull out a stick of salami - always kosher - and he'd wipe the knife he had just used on the beaver just once on his pants - and then use it to cut me off a slice, and pour me a glass of brandy to wash it down with."

Like much of Canada in the 1940s, Sudbury was not free of anti-Semitism. Judy was the only Jew in the Catholic school she attended for one year when the local public school had been closed down. "The name-calling began the day the nuns gave a lecture on Jews at Easter," she says. "The kids started calling me 'Christ killer,' and 'dirty Jew,' all the way home. I remember having to ask my father, 'Who is Christ?' Only

once in all my public-school years was I invited to another kid's birthday party."

It was Jack who taught her to handle anti-Semitism. "My father said, 'You ignore that. Never take no for an answer. You go on and become successful.' When I got older, ready to leave Sudbury and go off by myself to university, he said: 'I've taught you to shoot, paddle a canoe, hold your liquor, swear, and be a good Jew. That's all you need to take care of yourself.'"

"And how did you come to take care of others?" I asked.

"Shortly after the Second World War ended, when I was about six, a Polish couple - a Jew and a Gentile - moved into a rooming house next door. The woman, Sophie, a seamstress, was Jewish, spoke Yiddish, and started visiting our family and paying close attention to me. One night she told us that she had been married before, and had had two children murdered in Auschwitz, and that she had been used by Dr. Josef Mengele in one of the 'medical experiments' there."

At that point, her parents ushered Judy and her brother out of the room, but they snuck down and peered through the door. Sophie undressed, revealing her stomach and breasts. They were horribly scarred and disfigured. "Mengele," began Sophie, "said he wanted to determine how much pain a woman could have if she had her ovaries taken out without an anesthetic. . . ."

After Sophie told her story, Judy's parents didn't want her coming around too much. They felt Judy wasn't ready to hear about the Holocaust in such detail. "But I'd sneak over to the rooming house, around four o'clock after school. She'd make me chocolate milk and talk, and one day she asked me, 'When is your birthday, Judy?' and I told her the end of December. Then she told me 'Today is my daughter's birthday.' At first I didn't know what she meant. 'Today is her birthday? Happy birthday,' I said. Then in a blank voice, not even looking at me, something unwound in her, and she started reporting, in a driven, hypnotic way: 'There were two lines.' Then she screamed, 'I have to go into this line with my daughter!' She gave a scream like an animal. I can still hear it. I heard that sound come from other Syrian Jewish mothers to whom I had to say, I can get one of your children out, and only one, and I have to know which one in the next eight hours.' "

The link between the Dr. Mengele Sophie faced, and the Muhabarat Mrs. Judy confronted, was SS officer Aloes Brunner. Brunner, an Austrian, had been an important member of Adolf Eichmann's Office 4b4, the Reich agency in charge of implementing Hitler's Final Solution to the Jewish Problem. One of Brunner's last wartime acts was to round up 250 Jewish orphans in Paris and send them by cattle car to Auschwitz, just three weeks before the Allies liberated the French capital.

While Sophie was showing Judy her scars, Brunner was in flight, wanted by the Greeks and the French for hunting down and deporting 120,000 Jews, most of whom were murdered in the gas chambers of death camps. French courts sentenced him, in

absentia, to death. Germany issued a warrant in 1995, and Austria asked for his extradition.

**Brunner arrived in Syria in 1954 using the alias Dr. Georg Fischer.** The Syrians arrested him, but upon revealing his Nazi past, he was released. According to the Nazi-hunters Simon Wiesenthal and Beate Klarsfeld, and Andreas Sefiha, president of Thessaloniki's Jewish community, Brunner was given refuge in Damascus in return for his assistance in retooling the Muhabarat (later run by Hafez al-Assad's brother, Rifaat). The Daily Telegraph in London reported that **Brunner had specifically helped train the Muhabarat in torture.** He remained in Syria, except for a brief period during which he helped Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser recruit Nazi rocket scientists to help attack Israel. In 1985 the West German magazine Bunte published an interview with photographs of him in Syria. **Der Spiegel reported he was living in the Damascus Hotel Meridian as of July, 1999.**

Along with psychological torture, such as telling a victim his family is being tortured or staging executions, the Syrians, according to the Middle East Watch Report in 1990, developed torture machines, including al-Kursi al-Almani ("the German chair"), a metal chair with knives on it and hinges on the back. As the back is lowered, the strapped victim is slowly cut to pieces. Brunner, when he was an SS captain, favoured using a wire whip with fish-hook devices on the end. At Judy's, I met Gidi Ehrenhalt, who was an eighteen-year-old Israeli soldier when he was captured on the Golan, and placed in El Meza prison. He was in a two-by-one-metre cell without light for months, and visited daily by guards using the fish-hook whip. Ehrenhalt is now permanently disabled.

"The hardest part," she says, "was having no one to talk to. I had to keep things normal around the house, as in: 'Mummy, it's the phone, it's a Syrian Jew. . . .' 'Thank you, dear, you go do your homework.' They knew Mummy had some business, and knew not to ask.

I pulled out a copy of the letter from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in which he thanked her in 1995 for "twenty-three years of hard and dangerous work," and I asked her if she had thought much of the risks to herself, should something awful happen on one of her overseas trips.

"No," she answered. "I had blinkers on. But not anymore. Sometimes when you are really determined you don't look to the right or the left. I felt it must be done. I focused on what I could achieve and trying to eliminate what was around me. I learned to do that growing up, with a difficult home life. My parents didn't get along. They were always fighting, like you can't imagine. I used to run away and hide under a tree, in the bush. To survive it I put blinkers on. I knew I'd have to have blinkers on until I managed to leave.

"If you give in, it's easy for everything to fall apart." She paused. "You know, it's twenty-seven years yesterday that Ronald died." Considering that we were meeting on the day after Assad had died, we both sat silently, absorbing the irony.

She wasn't only nerves of steel. "I'd sit and cry when I had to remove a child from a parent, or know a parent would have to choose which child to free," she says. "And they didn't even know who I was."

Eleven-year-old Shimon Swed, suffering from eye cancer, couldn't get surgery in Syria and was going to die. Judy ransomed him and his parents, getting him to Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center in New York on the condition they left the two young Swed children behind. "I couldn't get those kids out of my mind. . . .," she says. "Meanwhile, the treatments were complicated - several years of surgery and chemo. The mother, Shafiya, was free but getting phone calls from her kids, weeping uncontrollably, 'But Mummy, I want you.' Four years passed. Shafiya couldn't take the mental torture and decided to go back to Syria. I begged her to give me more time to get her children out. 'I can't,' she said. Eventually, I got those kids. It wasn't for money that they held them, but for the pure cruelty of it. I learned to understand it only because I was able to get inside the minds of those on the receiving end. Their fear was coming out of their pores. And because Sophie became, along with my grandmother, a second mother, I did what I did for Sophie. I felt I owed her something. It felt like I, after coming from a difficult family, now had children, freedom, two wonderful husbands whom I loved, and who loved me. And, strange as it sounds, I felt I owed Sophie for the six million. So I thought, Sophie, I owe it to you to get these people out. And I did it."

Syrian Jewry had been rumored to have a second precious manuscript besides the Aleppo Keter, the Damascus Keter. Rabbi Hamra, who had been staying behind, willing to be one of the last to leave, knew of its secret location. In one of her final covert acts, Judy arranged for one of her Arabic-speaking couriers, a Westerner and a non-Jew, to go over the border with it buried in his business documents. Judy travelled to pick up the Keter. When she opened it in her Toronto home, she immediately saw its original bill of sale, in medieval Rashi script, suggesting it might be the famous lost Keter of Castile, Spain, dating back before the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. A second bill, written in Judeo-Arabic, showed it had moved east when the Jews fled the Inquisition. It was sold in Constantinople in 1515. Then it made its way to Damascus. Unlike the Aleppo Keter, which had so many pages destroyed or missing, the Damascus Keter was delivered to Mrs. Judy, and then ultimately to the National Library in Jerusalem, each page intact.

Such luck might have been expected from Mrs. Judy. In 3,218 rescues, not a single Jew was killed or caught, and today, even Rabbi Hamra lives with his family in Israel, a free man.

## Judith Feld Carr

(1939 - )

Judith Feld Carr, is a musician and humanitarian, who resides in Toronto, Ontario. Judy was born in Montreal, but spent much of her childhood in Sudbury, Ontario. She is best known for smuggling thousands of Jews out of [Syria](#). She did this in over 25 years in a secret operation.

Feld Carr obtained a Bachelor's of Education in music from the University of Toronto. Originally trained as a musician, Feld Carr taught music in Toronto for many years.

Feld Carr used funds from the Dr. Ronald (Rubin) Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands (established in 1973), donated privately, to negotiate the release of [Syrian Jews](#) from the Syrian government. The funds were used to literally buy Syrian Jews passage out of the country. The process took over 25 years to complete. The project was performed in complete secrecy to protect the lives of the Syrian immigrants as well as the leaders of the project. The Jews that were escorted out of Syria migrated to [Israel](#) and the United States.

Her work ostensibly focused on creating cells with Syrians temporarily abroad, to develop a reliable and secure information network. Each Syrian Jew was rescued through individual bribes organized by Feld Carr. In certain cases, she arranged successful escapes when bribery failed.

It is estimated that, in all, Judy Feld Carr facilitated the escape of 3,228 Jews.

The tale of her humanitarian work is detailed in Toronto academic Harold Troper's book, *The Ransomed of God: The Remarkable Story Of One Woman's Role in the Rescue of Syrian Jews* (2007) .

Judith Feld Carr has received numerous awards including the Order of Canada, the Simon Wiesenthal Award for Tolerance, Justice and Human Rights and the Haifa University Merit Award. Feld Carr also received an honorary degree from Laurentian University.

# MRS. JUDY'S SECRET

*The Untold Story of the Rescue of Syria's Jews*  
*A 90 Minute Feature Documentary Film*

## **Synopsis**

To her neighbors and friends she is a modest mother of 6, a grandmother of 13, and a retired university professor of music. But behind that genteel exterior is a woman of singular determination who, in secrecy from her home in Toronto, rescued over 3000 Syrian Jews from virtual bondage in Syria. For almost 30 years, from the 1970's until 2001, Judy Feld Carr – known to those she rescued as “Mrs. Judy”-- lived a secret life of international intrigue. Virtually single-handedly, she negotiated bribes to ransom people out of the country, engaged smugglers for those who could not be ransomed, and, one by one, took 3,228 Jews out of Syria to freedom. Of those she set free, not one was caught or killed. She accomplished what appears to be the biggest rescue by an individual since World War II. It was the best-kept secret in the Jewish world.

**MRS. JUDY'S SECRET will tell Feld Carr's remarkable story for the very first time.**

### **The Rescue:**

MRS. JUDY'S SECRET will reveal the harrowing stories of the families Judy Feld Carr saved – and will bring to light one of the worst and least known human rights abuses of the late 20th century: the oppression of Jews in Syria. For decades, Syrian Jews were trapped in a nightmare of repression and terror. They lived under the constant surveillance of the “Muhabarat,” a secret police force trained by one of Adolph Eichmann's right-hand men. Those who tried to escape faced imprisonment and torture; if they succeeded, punishment fell upon family members left behind. Jews were forbidden to own businesses, hold government or banking jobs, own radios or telephones; they were subject to a 10 pm curfew. Once Feld Carr learned their stories, she would not rest until she succeeded in bringing every Jewish person out of the country. Their rescue was the stuff of spy novels. Now, that secret story can finally be told.