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Professor sharing secrets of the Holocaust

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Steve Karcher, a history professor who teaches in the Irvington public schools, will present a lecture to the New Jersey World War II Book Club on Tuesday, Jan. 17, 7 p.m., at the [Millburn Free Public Library](#), about Heinrich Himmler, chief of the German police; minister of the interior and head of the Gestapo during the Nazi reign in Germany. Himmler was one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany from 1939 to 1945.

Karcher's lecture relates the story about Himmler and his doctor Felix Kersten, and how Kersten, at great risk to his own life and that of his family, persuaded Himmler to free thousands of Jews from the concentration camps where they were consigned to death. Himmler suffered excruciating stomach pains which, if untreated, threatened to end his career. He heard of Kersten's "magic hands" which could relieve his pain by their effective



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messages. Himmler forced Kersten into service as his personal physician and medical advisor and throughout the entire war compelled Kersten to be at his side constantly to relieve his chronic pain.

Kersten found himself in a unique position from which he could gather information which could be passed on to the U.S. Office of Strategic Service (OSS). He discovered that he could manipulate Himmler's psyche as well as ease his pain. As a result, Kersten was able to convince Himmler to resist some of Hitler's plans for the extermination of the Jews and save the lives of thousands who otherwise would have perished in the gas chambers. Kersten saved the lives of more than 60,000 Jews in concentration camps by persuading Himmler to disobey Hitler's direct order to kill them all.

During the lecture, Karcher will discuss how he came to be involved in this narrative through his great uncle Norbert Masur, a prominent official in the World Jewish Congress.

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In 1944 Masur managed to make contact with Kersten and persuaded him to introduce him to Himmler, and at great risk entered Germany to meet with Himmler. The plan was twofold: to give Himmler a way to save himself and to also induce him to save the lives of countless Jews who would otherwise have gone to their death in one of the many concentration camps. The plan was effective, but little was known of it until recent years.

In 2003 a French film maker named Emanuel Amara decided to make a documentary about Kersten. Masur played a prominent role in the film. In the process of making the documentary, Amara learned that Steve Karcher was lecturing at Brookdale College about his great uncle Masur and his relationship with Kersten. Accordingly, Amara invited Karcher to come to France and tell the story of his great uncle. Karcher possesses one of the few copies of the documentary and it will be shown during the lecture.

The story is also told in some detail in John Waller's book "The Devil's Doctor," and Karcher draws on this book for his narrative about his great uncle and his part in the story.

For further information on the NJWWII Book Club, call Dr. John J. McLaughlin at 973-467-



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